Hinduism Hindutva & Secularism

P.D. Mathew, S.J.

INDIAN SOCIAL INSTITUTE
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EDITOR'S NOTE

India is a multi-religious, multi-lingual and multi-cultural nation. Yet it has no state religion. According to the Constitution of India it is a secular State and every religion has equal status. The Constitution guarantees freedom of religion to all persons and protects the cultural rights of all its citizens and especially the minorities. Every religion in India has contributed considerably to the spiritual ethos and cultural growth of its people. All the people born in India are the children of the motherland and citizens of this country. The Constitution makers considered them as one --"we the people of India". Millions in India, irrespective of caste, creed, race or sex, language and place of birth sacrificed their lives to liberate India from the colonial rule of the British. The pioneers who led the nationalist struggle envisaged to develop India into a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic. They categorically resolved that the new State would not be a Hindu Rashtra but a secular State.

Today a majority of the people in India profess Hindu religion. Hinduism has been seen as a unique phenomenon of spirituality linked to a practical life and with a solid geographical base in a diversified sub-continent. Its greatest virtue has been its elasticity, its pluralism and its lack of dogmas. In the past Hindus have accepted Muslims, Christians and other minority religious groups and worked together to build the nation. There is a strong sense of nationhood and patriotism among all the people irrespective of their specific religious and cultural identity and all participate in the nation-building process. Despite its problems and constraints India is seen as a model for democratic functioning and cultural integration.

Unfortunately religious chauvinism and communalism have been on the increase, in recent times, in social and political life. The Sangh Parivar and its socio-political units are trying to use religion to divide the people of India in order to acquire political power. This has disasterous consequences for the unity and integrity of the country and the development of the people of India. They are ex-

ploiting the religious sentiments of the ignorant, illiterate and the poor, and they are spreading a communal and fundamentalist political ideology called 'Hindutva', the object of which is to create a Hindu Rashtra where the people of other religions will not be able to experience justice, equality, liberty and fraternity which are the fundamental principles and values of the Constitution of India.

At this juncture it is necessary to have a clear understanding of the principles and philosophy of Hinduism, Hindutva and secularism, and the aims and functioning of the Sangh Parivar so that patriotic people who believe in the vision and values of the Constitution can rally together to defend the country from the communal ideology of fragmenting India in the name of religion and to build it as a strong and modern nation.

The subject matter of this booklet in question-answer form, relates to the nature of Sangh Parivar and philosophy of Hinduism, Hindutva and secularism. What follows is based on the judicial decisions of the Supreme Court, opinions expressed by various knowledgeable persons in newspapers and magazines. The purpose of writing this booklet is to educate the common people on the various aspects of the subject matter under consideration.

Introduction

"WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a SOVEREIGN SOCIALIST SECULAR DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC and to secure to all its citizens:

JUSTICE, social, economic and political;

LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;

EQUALITY of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all

FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation."

These are the solemn declarations of the Constitution of India, written in the form of a solemn vow specifying the vision, mission and spirituality of every citizen and community in India. The founding fathers of our Constitution realised that only when the people of India irrespective of caste, creed, race, sex, language and place of birth experience equality, justice, liberty and fraternity that a united and modern India (Bharat) could be built. They visualised to build a secular India where people of all religions could work in harmony and realise their potentialities as individuals and groups. Hence India became a secular state; since a state would not practice any religion. However, all religions would be respected equally. According to the Constitution every religion has equal status. The State guarantees freedom of religion to all persons. All the religions enjoy the same constitutional protection without favour or discrimination. Which means our Constitution-makers respected spiritual values of all religions. To repeat, the state, however, would not practice any religion. Our secularism has to be understood and appreciated in the light of this, namely, equal respect for all religions.

A few decades ago the Sangh Parivar and its organisational units started showing vested interests in using religion for personal and political gains. They have been exploiting the religious aspirations and sentiments of the Hindus, the members of the majority

religious community in India, to achieve their selfish and narrow goals. They are trying to divide the people of India so that communal tension and conflicts on the basis of religion could be used to capture political power. Their call for declaring India a Hindu Rashtra means , plain and simple, plunging the country into chaos. Their "secularism" means hinduism; This is contradiction in terms. To achieve its selfish and narrow goals the Sangh Parivar is trying to mislead the Hindus by creating a communal and fundamentalist political ideology called 'Hindutva'. It has been done by misinterpreting the philosophy of Hinduism, a religious faith.

The Supreme Court of India in the case of *Bal Thackeray vs. Shri Prabhakar kashinath Kunte & Others* explained the meaning of the terms "Hinduism" and "Hindutva" from a philosophical, sociological and historic perspective. According to the apex court the words "Hinduism" and "Hindutva" are not necessarily to be understood as construed narrowly, confined only to the strict Hindu religious practices unrelated to the culture and ethos of the people of India, depicting the way of life of the Indian people. Unless the context of a speech indicates a contrary meaning or use, in the abstract these terms are indicative more of a way of life of the Indian people and are not confined merely to describe a person practicing the Hindu religion as a faith. It is difficult to appreciate how in the face of the Supreme Court decisions the term "Hindutva" or "Hinduism" *per se*, in the abstract, can be assumed to mean and be equated with narrow fundamentalist Hindu religious bigotry. It is unfortunate, if in spite of judicial decisions, these terms, Hinduism and Hindutva, are misused by Sangh Parivar to gain unfair political advantage. Misuse of these expressions to promote communalism cannot alter the true meaning of these terms. In the opinion of the Court the mischief resulting from the misuse of these terms must be checked and the fundamentalism arising out of it must be curbed with a heavy hand to preserve and promote the secular creed of the nation.

Today a serious threat has been posed by forces acting in the name of "Hindutva", by communalisation of Indian society. They have formed cultural and political organisations to create communal ideologies and identities. The efforts of the Sangh Parivar to rally

the Hindus in the name of religion had very marginal success till 1945. But during the last ten years there has been was a sudden upswing of Hindu communalism. The Sangh Parivar has made use of its political and cultural organisations to ensure communal presence in all aspects of life and different areas of the society. It succeeded in making communalism the central question for Indian politics in the 1990s. To achieve this the said forces had used the symbol of Ram and Ayodhya temple. Within a short period the message resonated in the minds of a large segments of Hindu society. The Hindu communal argument aroused acceptance in an unprecedented manner. Today the Hindutva communal ideology has been embedded in different strata of Hindu society and its political potential continue to be powerful. The success can be attributed to the organisational and manipulative skills of the Sangh Parivar. This easy and rapid mobilisation of Hindu religious sentiments through the manipulation and misinterpretation of 'Hindutva' ideology call for a serious and critical analysis.

At the time of Independence, Pandit Nehru and Congress leaders thought that religions should not have any place in politics. They realised that if India was to turn away from a steep descent into savage barbarism, sound principles of national cohesion had to be asserted. The concept of secularism provided the sole answer as the binding cement of Indian society. So Nehru and his colleagues started a slow, at times faltering, but steady effort seeking to divorce religion from public life and government affairs and to assure the religious minorities that the faiths they professed would have no bearing on their civic rights.

But because of the peculiar situation of religions in India Nehru sought for a practical approach in dealing with religious matters. The practical answer, he felt, as we have referred to above, was not opposition to religion but the removal of religion from public affairs, the separation of the State from all faiths, the insistence on religion as a personal matter for the individual citizen, and freedom for the profession of diverse forms of religious worship provided there was no conflict among them. Only a secularism of this type adapted to the Indian context, he realised, could be the cornerstone of an egalitarian, forward looking society with religious pluralism,

full civil liberties and equal opportunities. He believed it was the only possible social cement for a modern nation with religious feelings and the only way of making certain that one's religion does not lead automatically to one being treated as second class citizen.[1]

At the time of Independence, the Government had taken pride in its stated commitment to build a secular environment for public life. It was expected that the new nation-state would evolve a governing framework that would reflect its moorings in a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious civil society. The bitter lessons of Partition and the two-nation theory enunciated by Mohammed Ali Jinnah led the Indian leaders to believe that India as a nation-state could survive and develop only on the basis of a set of political values that could hold universal appeal and not on values and cultures affiliated to a particular religion. It was realised that only in a secular environment could the people exercise their full potential as citizens of a new India. The founding fathers of the Constitution wanted to push the Indian State to a secular governance because they felt that to wield political authority over the diverse and stratified base the new state would have to avoid identification with any one specified culture or religion.

The fragmenting vision of a Hindu Rshtra as propounded in the pre-independence period by Hindu leaders like V.D. Savarkar, K.B. Hedgewar and Golwalkar was overshadowed by the secular and democratic nationalism led by the Congress party. The *Hindutvavadis* who portrayed Muslims and other minorities as foreigners and enemies of the country had very little political influence untill the sixties because of the Nehruvian consensus on socio-economic development and secularism. It is only when the state as represented by the Congress party regimes in the later decades began adopting political strategies designed to appeal to majoritarian sentiment, did the Hindu nationalist forces return to the Savarkar-Golwalkar agenda of Hindutva in what would be for them a relatively effortless campaign to regain political ground.

The political consensus in favour of secularism and democratic values began to unravel after the Nehru era because of lack of commitment of the successive Congress governments to these val-

ues. The efforts of these governments to appease the majority and minority communities for securing votes created a phase of competitive communalism and using this opportunity the nationalist forces gained momentum for a politics of communalism which finally led to the emergence of a Hindutva as a full-fledged political doctrine. This doctrine proposed to reconstruct India in the image of a Hindu Rashtra. For this the Sangh Parivar with the new political ideology created a tide of chauvinist sentiments against the minorities. In the process it has pushed back the secular democratic framework of governance. This is a development fraught with dangerous implications for India's survival as a democratic nation.

Hindutva as a political ideology and as a phenomenon requires the construction of a threatening "other" or an enemy to rally mass sentiment behind it. Part of the strategy of mobilising Hindu chauvinism is to portray the Muslims and Christians as foreigners and enemies. The vicious slogans that were hurled at the Muslims during the Partition and later the Ayodhya agitation, and the atrocities committed against the Christians in Gujarat are clear examples of the same. Small wonder the Muslims and Christian minorities in India feel besieged.

The Sangh Parivar, the heirs to the Savarkar-Golwalkar traditions, has adopted the majoritarian idioms and publicly suggest that Rama, a Hindu symbol, should be held as a national symbol. Slogan that rent the air during the Ayodhya agitation echoed this theme. An instance of this was the chant, *Hindu jaaga, desh jaagega*! (with the Hindu awakening, the nation awakes).

The logic of the majoritarianist argument is that the responsibility for harmonious co-existence rests on the minorities and for that they have to make adequate adaptations and adjustments in religious and socio-political life. In other words the minorities would have to reconcile themselves to living within a political framework that was unabashedly dominated by the ethos of the Hindu majority. What was envisaged was for the minorities to be second class citizens in a Hindu Rashtra.[2]

In the name of pluralism that obtains in India, the forces of Hindutva are striving to fabricate a political majority based on

religious faith. In other words, the multi-pronged project of Hindutva is trying to create a political constituency through manipulation of a majoritarian and homogenized Hindu identity. The mobilisation of the majority is attempted in a variety of ways including invocation of cultural symbols, aggressive political demonstration like *ratha yatra* etc. It wants to openly declare India as a Hindu nation in conformity with the basic tenets of Hinduism. New meanings are being welded out of the same messages so as to mobilise even larger segments of the population in defence of the Hindu nation. The underlying feature of all this has been violence to religious sensibility and appropriation of popular dreams and memories. The strategy of people's dreams and memories involves reinterpretation of their histories, distortion of their folktales, disembodiment and rearrangement of their rituals and symbols.

The Sangh Parivar has recognized and explored the potential use of symbols and rituals of the Hindu religious tradition which were alive in the popular imagination and practices for centuries. In today's blatant form it also focusses its attention on the insistence of the minorities who have been largely excluded from the fruits of development. Labelled as secessionists, they are also seen as posing a threat to the national integration. The Sangh Parivar is also trying to homogenise, reinterpret and control small communities like SCs/ STs and their diverse origins and identities.

To capture the attention of the common people the Sangh Parivar is crying out to protect Hinduism from the evils of modernity and the malaise of western societies by discrediting them and pointing to their distortions and perversions. In this process it tries to glorify its own tradition and celebrate its difference, uniqueness and resilience as a bulwark of resistance to the evils of modernity. Its tradition is upheld as the haven of virtue and morality. The west is denounced for its tendency to judge, dilute or destroy a traditional identity based on a shared culture and common sentiments.

To consolidate its position in politics the Sangh Parivar and BJP is trying to control the educational system by using the Human Resource Ministry at the Centre and Education Ministry in the States. The Hindutva forces have a clear target to mould and condi-

tion the minds of the young ones. To achieve this thousands of nursery and primary schools have been established in rural areas to promote Hindutva ideology, and history text books are tampered with to sow the seeds of conflict between Hindus and Muslims.

To Hinduise the educational system the Sangh Parivar is trying to introduce the system of taking moral classes for school children by the RSS *pracharaks* and the practice of singing Saraswati Vandana instead of singing the national anthem. Through all these the Sangh Parivar is striving to equate Hinduisation with Indianisation. It is a game of serious consequence for not only the religious harmony in the country but also for its integrity.

It is true that the British education system is not suitable for India today. But the solution does not lie in replacing it with a Hindu system. Will not an education system based on one religious ideology hurt seriously a pluralist system and destroy our composite culture and religious harmony? Will it not generate further intolerance? Should not Sangh Parivar emphasize today scientific and value oriented education rather than introducing rituals pertaining to a particular religious tradition and then describing it as spiritualising the education system? A uni-dimensional attempt will only breed resentment and hatred for others. In the process a culture and climate of intolerance will be firmly established in the country.

Throughout our history, the dominant castes and classes have tried to further their own interests and subvert popular history either through selective appropriation of cultural symbols or through destruction of the critical impulses of people for equality and justice. It is unfortunate that at this present juncture in our history, these hegemonic forces are once again trying to gain ascendance. It is important for us to understand how this hegemonization process has worked through the centuries and culminated in the present situation.

The Sangh Parivar is keen to amend the Constitution to take away the fundamental rights of citizens related to freedom of religion and cultural and educational rights of the minorities. Such an attempt will destroy the basic features of our Constitution and secular ideology and pluralistic vision of our nation.

India's main strength is its religious and cultural plurality. Any attack on it is tantamount to attacking India's integrity. Extremism in religion is always counter productive and it brings ridicule to it. Extremism negates the basic qualities of every society. Extremists may appear to be defending their religion but in fact they are destroying it.

Religions extremism creates disharmony, hatred, violence, conflicts, divisiveness and dissension. It is directly in contradiction to religious values.

Hinduism has been known for its emphasis on pluralism in religion. India thus has been a pluralistic country for ages. It assimilated all traditions within its religion and culture. Two great religions i.e. Christianity and Islam were also harmoniously accommodated. But the Hindutva forces, contrary to the values of Hinduism, represent extremism and intolerance.

Extremism and intolerance are often the product of threat perceptions, and for upper caste Hindus threat perceptions began to increase since the 1980s when the Dalits and other backward castes began to pose serious challenge to them. The Sangh Parivar determined to widen its base and capture power to retain upper caste hegemony, intensified its propaganda and threat perceptions of the Hindu elite, and the BJP succeeded in capturing power at the centre and in some States.[3]

The BJP rule at the Centre and in some states have emboldened the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bajrang Dal to terrorise the minority communities. In 1998-99 the Christians came under a systematic attack by the saffron brigade in Gujarat. Undeniably ultra-Hindu elements have become hyperactive under the impression that with the saffron brigade in office, law enforcement agencies will turn their eyes the other way. This is a far more disturbing development than murder or mayhem for gain.

The Rashtriya Sevak Sangh (RSS) does not recognise human rights as it does not believe in the individuality of a person. To them secularism is meaningless. According to the Hindutva ideology being professed by the RSS, "an individual is a part of the family, society and universe--all part of the Paramatma."[4]

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad's remarks on the award of Nobel Prize to Dr. Amartya Sen and earlier to Mother Teresa, show how national goals can be communalised and achievements and excellence, at individual and collective levels, can be misjudged and distorted when viewed in an ideologically blinkered perspective. According to the VHP President, Mr. Ashok Singhal, the conferment of the Nobel Prize on Dr. Sen and Mother Teresa was part of an international Christian conspiracy to convert Indians from Hinduism. Such views are too weird to be taken seriously but their dangerous potential cannot be underestimated. If arguments for promotion of literacy and public health are seen as conspiracies against the country, there is no hope for development. It also shows that the vested interests--communal organsiation such as Sangh Parivar--have in keeping the people backward by denying them the basic prerequisites of human welfare.[5]

The argument that India should become a Hindu republic since Pakistan is a theocratic state (Islamic), is fallacious. Most communal forces fail to realise that religion cannot be the only factor that can sustain a nation and solve its problems. It is the socio-economic factors that will determine the stability of a government and development of the people. Most theocratic nations in the world have revealed that they are incapable of handling various political challenges that emerge from their civil societies.[6]

Who has given absolute authority to the Sangh parivar and its leaders to re-interpret Hinduism and to speak on behalf of the millions of Hindus? It is a universal principle that if a man is ill he seeks a doctor for cure. If there is a problem involving the religious sentiments of people then the religious leaders have to take the leadership in providing a remedy. In religious matters if at all anyone has the authority to speak for the Hindus it should be religious heads like Shankaracharyas. But the political leaders of the Sangh Parivar with vested interests are ignoring the Hindu gurus and playing with the religious sentiments of the Hindus. Some groups of the Sangh Parivar feel and act as if Hinduism is their private property. In a democratic society like India politicians have to realise their limits of power. They must restrain themselves from interfering in religious matters. They must not use religion to gain political power

and cause divisions and communal conflicts among the people. So long as the Indian masses remain illiterate, ignorant and unemployed the clutches of the Sangh Parivar will tighten its grip.[7]

India is expected to be a model for democratic functioning, religious tolerance, communal harmony and cultural integration. In a country with diverse religions, different ethnic groups and cultural pluralism only a secular ideology and a socio-economic thrust can unite the people and create a stable civil society. In such a society it is crucial that a particular religious group is not allowed to hamper the harmonious co-existence of different religious groups.

The uncomfortable political truth that has emerged from the record of the last decades is that as long as the state has uncompromisingly anchored to secular principles and kept its distance from communal leaders or groups, the capacity of these forces to manipulate the political context has been effectively limited. It is clear that as the Congress party drifted towards Hindu nationalism in the eighties, pursuing policies towards Kashmir, Assam and Punjab that had strong tinges of bias towards the Hindu communities in these regions, it also gave legitimacy and a fresh lease of life to the Hindu chauvinist forces. It also brought the BJP out of its virtual hibernation since 1980 and injected fresh vigour into its more strident partners, the RSS and the VHP.

The historical record of the growth of the Hindutva phenomenon in Indian political life belies the suggestion that it is possible for the BJP or any other such political entity that draws its *raison d'etre* from Hindu nationalism, to "moderate" its stance. The BJP and the VHP would be the first to acknowledge that its spurts of growth or influence during the last five decades have been directly linked to the effectiveness of its Hindu national platform. If in the sixties, the Jan Sangh needed the "Cow Protection Movement" to build a Hindu vote bank, today, the BJP recognizes that a platform of emotive appeal to chauvinist Hindu sentiment is its only really effective political instrument.

Such tactics and strategies of mobilisation which can only polarise Indian civil society have destructive consequences for the sense of national identity. India which has painstakingly built a

record of skilfull governance of a complex and pluralist society cannot afford to have that precious achievement jeopardised by such approaches which would fragment our society.[8]

It is the duty of all secular forces in the country who are committed to the plurality of our culture and our society to oppose the anti-social and anti-national ideology of the Sangh Parivar. Unfortunately the secular forces are not rising upto this challenge as they are not only divided against themselves but also busy playing their own political games.

Secularism, the sole hope of the future, can survive in free India only if both majorities and minorities conduct themselves in a civilised manner.[9]

The national ethos would have to be uncompromisingly secular and democratic if India is to provide an all encompassing umbrella under which diverse ethnicities, religious and linguistic groups can co-exist and fulfill their destinies.[10]

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I: HINDUISM

a) Supreme Court on Hinduism and Hindutva

Q. **What are the meanings and explanations accepted and given to the terms "Hinduism" and "Hindutva" by the Supreme Court in its judgement *Bal Thackeray* vs. *Shri Prabhakar Kashinath Kunte & Others*?[1]**

A. On December 11, 1995, a three-Judge bench of the Supreme Court delivered judgements in a number of appeals which arose from decisions of the Bombay High Court relating to the validity of the elections of certain Shiv Sena-BJP candidates to the Maharasthra legislative Assembly. The Bombay High Court had set aside the elections of these candidates mainly on the ground that they had committed a corrupt practice as defined by Section 123(3) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951. The Supreme Court reversed the judgement of the High Court.

The following paragraphs written in a question-answer form are taken from the above judgement related to the meanings of the terms "Hinduism" and "Hindutva".

Q. **What is the historical and etymological genesis of the word "Hindu"?**

A. The view generally accepted by the scholars appears to be that the word "Hindu" is derived from the river Sindhu otherwise known as Indus which flows from the Punjab. That part of the great Aryan race which immigrated from Central Asia through the mountain passes into India, settled first in the districts near the river Sindhu (now called the Indus). The Persians pronounced this word Hindu and called their Aryan brethren Hindus.

The Greeks, who probably gained their first ideas of India from the Persians, dropped the hard aspirate, and called the Hindus "Indoi".[2]

Q. **What was the observation made by Dr. Radhakrishnan regarding the origin of the word "Hindu"?**

A. He observed: "The Hindu civilization is so-called, since its original founders or earliest followers occupied the territory drained by the Sindhu (the Indus) river system corresponding to the North West Frontier Province and the Punjab. This is recorded in the Rig Veda, the oldest of the Vedas, the Hindu scriptures which give their name to this period of Indian history. The people on the Indian side of the Sindhu were called Hindu by the Persian and the later western invaders."

Q. What was the meaning given to the term "Hindu" by Dr. Radhakrishnan?

A. The term "Hindu", according to Dr. Radhakrishnan had originally a territorial and not a credal significance. It implied residence in a well-defined geographical area. Aboriginal tribes, savages and half civilised people, the cultured Dravidians and the vedic Aryans were all Hindus as they were the sons of the same mother. The Hindu thinkers reckoned with the striking fact that the men and women dwelling in India belonged to different communities, worshipped different gods and practised different rites.[3]

Q. What was originally understood as "Hinduism?"

A. The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol.VI, p.86 has described "Hinduism" as the title applied to that form of religion which prevails among the vast majority of the present population of the Indian Empire.

Q. What is the definition of Hindu religion?

A. It is difficult, if not impossible, to define Hindu religion or even adequately describe it, because unlike other religion in the world, the Hindu religion does not claim any one founder. "It does not worship any one God; it does not subscribe to any one dogma; it does not believe in any one philosophic concept; it does not follow any one set of religious rights or performances. In fact, it does not appear to satisfy the narrow traditional features of any religion or creed. It may broadly be described as a way of life and nothing more.[4]

Q. What was the observation made by the great scholar Monier Williams on "Hinduism?"

A. He has observed: "It must be borne in mind that Hinduism is far more than a mere form of theism resting on Brahmanism. It presents for our investigation a complex congeries of creeds and doctrines which in its gradual accumulation may be compared to the gathering together of the mighty volume of the Ganges, swollen by a continual influx of tributary rivers and rivulets, spreading itself over an ever-increasing area of country and finally resolving itself into an intricate Delta of tortuous streams and *jungly* marshes... The Hindu religion is a reflection of the composite character of the Hindus, who are not one people but many. It is based on the idea of universal receptivity. It has ever aimed at accommodating itself to circumstances, and has carried on the process of adaptation through more than three thousand years. It has first borne with and then, so to speak, swallowed, digested, and assimilated something from all creeds."[5]

Q. Can the usual tests, which can be applied in relation to any recognized religion or religious creed in the world, be applied in dealing with the problem of Hindu religion?

A. Those tests which can be applied in relation to any recognized religion in the world found to be inadequate in dealing with the problem of Hindu religion.

Q. Why not?

A. Normally, any recognized religion or religious creed subscribes to a body of set philosophic concepts and theological beliefs. But Hindu religion does not subscribe to any one dogma or belief in any one philosophic concept.

According to Dr.Radhakrishnan: The history of Indian thought emphatically brings out the fact that the development of Hindu religion has always been inspired by an endless quest of the mind for truth based on the consciousness that truth has many facets. The Indian mind has, consistently through the ages, been exercised over the problems of the nature of godhead, the

problem that faces the spirit at the end of life, and the interrelation between the individual and the universal soul.

"If we can abstract from the variety of opinion and observe that the general spirit of the Indian thought, we shall find that it has a disposition to interpret life and nature in the way of monastic idealism, though this tendency is so plastic, living and manifold that it takes many forms and expresses itself in even mutually hostile teachings."[6]

Naturally enough it was realised by Hindu religion from the very beginning of its career that truth was many-sided and different views contained different aspects of truth which no one could fully express. This knowledge inevitably bred a spirit of tolerance and willingness to understand and appreciate the opponent's point of view. That is how "the several views set forth in India in regard to the vital philosophic concepts are considered to be the branches of the self-same tree. The short cuts and blind alleys are somehow reconciled with the main road of advance to the truth." When we consider the broad sweep of the Hindu philosophic concepts, it would be realized that under Hindu philosophy, there is no scope for excommunicating any notion or principle as heretical and rejecting it as such.[7]

Q. What is clearly shown by the historical development of Hindu religion and philosophy?

A. The development of Hindu religion and philosophy shows that from time to time saints and religious reformers attempted to remove from the Hindu thought and practices elements of corruption and superstition. That led to the formation of different sects. Buddha started Buddhism, Mahavir founded Jainism, Basava became the founder of Lingayat religion, Dhyaneshwar and Tukaram initiated the Varakari cult; Guru Nanak inspired Sikhism; Dayananda founded Arya Samaj. Chaitanya promoted Bhakti cult. As a result of the teachings of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, Hindu religion flowered into its most attractive, progressive and dynamic form. If we study the teachings of these saints and religious reformers, we would notice an

amount of divergence in their respective views; but underneath that divergence, there is a kind of subtle indescribable unity which keeps them within the sweep of the broad and progressive Hindu religion.[8]

Q. What is the observation of Toynbee regarding "the broad sweep of Hindu religion"?

A. He observed: "When we pass from the plane of social practice to the plane of intellectual outlook, Hinduism too comes out well by comparison with the religions and ideologies of the South-West Asian group. In contrast to these Hinduism has the same outlook as the pre-Christian and pre-Muslim religions and philosophies of the Western half of the old world. Like them, Hinduism takes it for granted that there is more than one valid approach to truth and to salvation and that these different approaches are not only compatible with each other, but are complementary."[9]

Q. What is the description of the Hindu religion given by B.G. Tilak in his treatise *Gitarahasya?*

A. "Acceptance of the Vedas with reverence; recognition of the fact that the means or ways of salvation are diverse; and realisation of the truth that the number of gods to be worshipped is large, that indeed is the distinguishing feature of Hindu religion."

Q. How is the term "Hinduism" defined in unabridged English Edition of Webster's Third New International Dictionary?

A. In this Dictionary the term "Hinduism" has been defined as meaning a complex body of social, cultural and religious beliefs and practices evolved in and largely confined to the Indian subcontinent and marked by a caste system, an outlook lending to view all forms and theories as aspects of one eternal being and truth, a belief in ahimsa, karma, dharma, sansara and moksha and the practice of the way of works, the way of knowledge, or the way of devotion as the means of release from the bound of rebirth; the way of life and form of thought of a Hindu."

Q. What is the definition of the term "Hinduism", given by Encyclopaedia Britannica (15th Edition)?

A. In it the term "Hinduism" has been defined as meaning "the civilization of Hindus (originally, the inhabitants of the land of the Indus river). It properly denotes the Indian civilization of approximately the last 2000 years which gradually evolved from Vedism, the religion of the ancient Indo-Europeans who settled in India in the last centuries of the 2nd millennium B.C. Because it integrates a large variety of heterogeneous elements, Hinduism constitutes a very complex but largely continuous whole, and since it covers the whole of life, it has religious, social, economic, literary, and artistic aspects. As a religion, Hinduism is an utterly diverse conglomerate of doctrines, cults, and way of life.... In principle Hinduism incorporates all forms of belief and worship without necessitating the selection for elimination of any. The Hindu is inclined to revere the divine in every manifestation, whatever it may be, and is doctrinally tolerant, leaving others--including both Hindus and non-Hindus--whatever creed and worship practices suit them best. A Hindu may embrace a non-Hindu religion without ceasing to be a Hindu, and since the Hindu is disposed to think synthetically and to regard other forms of worship, strange gods, and divergent doctrines as inadequate rather than wrong or objectionable, he tends to believe that the highest divine powers complement each other for the well-being of the world and mankind. Few religious ideas are considered to be finally irreconciliable. The core of religion does not even depend on the existence or non-existence of God or on whether there is one God or many. Since religious truth is said to transcend all verbal definition, it is not conceived in dogmatic terms. Hinduism is, then both a civilization and a conglomerate of religions, with neither a beginning, a founder, nor a central authority, hierarchy, or organisation. Every attempt at a specific definition of Hinduism has proved unsatisfactory in one way or another, the more so because the finest Indian scholars of Hinduism, including Hindus themselves, have emphasized different aspects of the whole."[10]

Q. How did our Constitution makers affirm the broad and comprehensive character of Hindu religion?

A. The Constitution-makers were fully conscious of the broad and comprehensive character of Hindu religion; and so, while guaranteeing the fundamental right to freedom of religion, Explanation II to Article 25 has made it clear that in sub-clause (b) of clause (2), the reference to Hindus shall be construed as including a reference to person professing the Sikh, Jain or Buddhist religion, and the reference to Hindu religions institutions shall be construed accordingly.[11]

Q. What is the description given to the term 'Hinduism' by the Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court in Commissioner of Wealth Tax, Madras & Others v. Late R. Sridharan (by L.Rs)?

A. In its decision the Bench said: "... it is a matter of common knowledge that Hinduism embraces within self so many diverse forms of beliefs, faiths, practices and worship that it is difficult to define the term 'Hindu' with precision."[12]

Q. What are the basic characteristics of Hinduism explained by Gajendergadkar, C.J. in the case of Shastri Yagnapurushdasji & Ors. v. Muldas Bhundardas Vaishya?

A. Beneath the diversity of philosophic thoughts, concepts and idea expressed by Hindu philosophers who started different philosophic schools, lie certain broad concepts which can be treated as basic. The first among these basic concepts if the acceptance of the Veda as the highest authority in religious and philosophic matters. This concern necessarily implies that all the systems claim to have drawn their principles from a common reservoir of thought enshrined in the Veda. The Hindu teachers were thus obliged to use the heritage they received from the past in order to make their views readily understood. The other basic concept which is common to the six systems of Hindu philosophy is that all of them accept the view of the great world rhythm. Vast periods of creation, maintenance and dissolution follow each other in endless succession. This theory is not in consistent with belief in progress: for it is not a

question of the movement of the world reaching its goal times without number, and being again forced back to its starting-point.

It means that the race of man enters upon and retravels its ascending path of realisation. This interminable succession of world ages has no bargaining." It may also be said that all the systems of Hindu philosophy believe in rebirth and pre-existence. "Our life is a step on a road, the direction and goal of which are lost in the infinite. On this road, death is never an end or an obstacle but at most the beginning of new steps (11)." Thus, it is clear that unlike other religions and religious creeds, Hindu religion is not tied to any definite set of philosophic concepts as such.[13]

Q. What are the characteristic features of Hindu religion mentioned in the decision in Bhagwan Koer v. J.C. Bose & Ors.?

A. In this case the Calcutta High Court held that Hindu religion is marvellously catholic and elastic. Its theology is marked by eclecticism and tolerance and almost unlimited freedom of private worship. ....[14]

Q. What is the scope and nature of the Hindu religion on the basis of the judicial opinions expressed above?

A. On the basis of the judicial opinions expressed above it can be concluded that the Hindu religion holds within its fold men of divergent views and traditions which have very little in common except a vague faith in what may be called the fundamentals of the Hindu religion.

The judicial decisions also indicate that no precise meaning can be ascribed to the term "Hindu",, 'Hindutva' and 'Hinduism', and no meaning in the abstract can confine it to the narrow limits of religion alone, excluding the content of Indian culture and heritage. It is also indicated that the term 'Hindutva' is related to more to the way of life of the people in the subcontinent.[15]

Q. What was the opinion expressed about Hinduism by Justices Bharucha and Ahmadi in Ayodya case?

A. In that case they observed: "... Hinduism is a tolerant faith. It is that tolerance that has enabled Islam, Christianity, Jainism and Sikhism to find shelter and support upon this land. ..." (p.442)[16]

Q. What is ordinarily understood by the term 'Hindutva'?

A. Ordinarily 'Hindutva' is understood as a way of life or a state of mind and it is not to be equated with or understood as religious Hindu fundamentalism.

Q. What was the opinion expressed by Maulana Wahiduddin Khan about 'Hindutva' as a strategy to solve minorities problem in his book "Indian Muslims--the Need for A Positive Outlook" (1994)?

A. He said: "The strategy worked out to solve the minorities problem was, although differently worded, that of Hindutva or Indianisation. This strategy, briefly stated, aims at developing a uniform culture by obliterating the differences between all of the cultures co-existing in the country. This was felt to be the way to communal harmony and national unity. It was thought that this would put an end once and for all to the minorities problem."[17]

Q. What does the above opinion of Maulana Wahiduddin Khan indicate?

A. The above opinion indicates that the word "Hindutva" is used and understood as a synonym of 'Indianisation', i.e. development of uniform culture by obliterating the differences between all the cultures co-existing in the country.

Q. According to the Supreme Court, what do the terms "Hinduism" and "Hindutva" indicate in the abstract?

A. The Corut sdaid: "Thus, it cannot be doubted, particularly in view of the Constitution Bench decisions of this Court that the words "Hinduism" or "Hindutva" are not necessarily to be understood and construed narrowly, confined only to the strict

Hindu religious practices unrelated to the culture and ethos of the people of India, depicting the way of life of the Indian people. Unless the cotnext of a speech indicates a contrary meaning or use, in the abstract these terms are indicative more of a way of life of the Indian people and are not confined merely to describe persons rpactising the Hindu religion as a faith."

The Court further held: "Considering the terms 'Hinduism" or 'Hindutva' *per se* as depicting hostility, enmity or intolerance towards other religious faiths or professing communalism,proceeds from an improper appreciation and perception of the true meaning of these expression emerging from the detailed discussion in earlier authorities of this court. Misuse of these expressions to promote communalism cannot alter the true meaning of the terms. The mischief resulting from the misuse of the terms by anyone in his speech has to be checked and not its permissible use.It is indeed very unfortunate, if in spite of the liberal and tolerant features of 'Hinduism' recognized in judicial decisions, these terms are misused by anyone during the elections to gain any unfair political advantage. Fundamentalism of any colour or kind must be curbed with a heavy hand to preserve and promote the secular creed of the nation. Any misuse of these terms must, therefore, be dealt with strictly." [18]

Q. What is the final verdict of the Supreme Court in this case regarding the use of the terms "Hindutva" or "Hinduism" in an election speech?

A. In its jdugement the court held: "It is, therefore, a fallacy and and error of law to proceed on the assumption that any reference to 'Hindutva' or 'Hinduism' in a speech makes it automatically a speech based on the Hindu religion as opposed to the other religions or that the use of words "Hindutva" of "Hinduism" *per se* depict an attitude hostile to all persons practising any religion other than the Hindu religion. It is the kind of use made of these words and the meaning sought to be conveyed in the speech which has to be seen and unless such a

construction leads to the conclusion that these words were used to appeal for votes for a Hindu candidate on the ground that he is a Hindu or not to vote for a candidate because he is not a Hindu, the mere fact that these words are used in the speech would not bring it within the prohibition of sub-section (3) or (3A) of Sectionb 123. It may well be, that these words are used in a speech to promote secularism or to emphasise the way of life of the Indian people and the Indian culture or ethos, or to criticise the policy of any political party as discriminatory or intolerant. The parliamentary debates, including the clarifications made by the Law Minsiter also bring out this difference between the prohibited and permissible speech in this context. Whether a particular speech in which reference is made to Hindutva and/or Hinduism falls within the prohibition under sub-section (3) of (3A) of Section 123 is, therefore, a question of fact in each case.

This is the correct premise in our view on which all such matters are to be examined. The fallacy is in the assumption that a speech in whcih reference is made to Hindutva or Hinduism must be a speech on the ground of Hindu religion so that if the candidate for whom the speech is made happens to be a Hindu, it must necessarily amount to a corrupt practice under sub-section (3) and/or sub-section (3A) fo Section 123 of the Representation of People's Act, 1951. As indicated, there is no such presumption permissible in law contrary to the several Constitution Bench decisions referred herein."[19]

b) Criticism of the Judgement by Justice V.M. Tarkunde (retd)

Q. Which provisions of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, was watered down by this judgement?

A. By this judgement the Supreme Court Bench has watered down to a very material extent the rigour of the provision on corrupt practice defined by Section 123(3) of the Representation of the People Act in respect of candidates who stood for Hindutva or who appealed to the creation of a Hindu State.

Q. What is the definition of "corrupt practice" given in Section 123(3) of the Act?

A. The corrupt practice defined in Section 123(3) consists of "the appeal by a candidate or his agent or by any other person with the consent of a candidate or his election agent to vote or refrain from voting for any person on the ground of his religion ... ."

Q. What is the effect of watering down the meaning and rigour of that provision?

A. Larger Benches of the Supreme Court had previously held that secular democracy is one of the basic features of the Indian constitution and that Section 123(3) of the Representation of the People Act was intended to uphold the principle of secular democracy. By watering down the meaning and the rigour of that provision, the present three-judge Bench of the Supreme Court has dealt a very severe blow to the principle of secular democracy.

Q. Which previous Supreme Court judgements have influenced the above decision of the Supreme Court?

A. Judgements: Dr. Ramesh Yeshwant Prabhoo vs. Shri Prabhakar Kashinath Kunte & Others; Manohar Joshi vs Nitin Bhaurao Patel & another; and Prof. Ramchandra G. Kapse vs Haribansh Ramakbal Singh.

Q. In what sense the Supreme Court Bench dealt with the meaning of the word 'Hindutva' or 'Hinduism' when used in election propaganda in the case of Dr. Ramesh Yeshwant Prabhoo?

A. In the case of Dr. Ramesh Yeshwant Prabhoo, the Supreme Court Bench dealt with the meaning of the word "Hindutva" or "Hinduism" when used in election propaganda. The court came to the conclusion that "the words "Hinduism" or "Hindutva" are not necessarily to be understood and construed narrowly, confined only to the strict Hindu religious practices unrelated to the culture and ethos of the people of India depicting the way of life of the Indian people. Unless the context of a speech

indicates a contrary meaning or use, in the abstract, these terms are indicative more of a way of life of the Indian people and are not confined merely to describe persons practicing the Hindu religion as a faith." This clearly means that, by itself, the word "Hinduism" or "Hindutva" indicates the culture of the people of India as a whole, irrespective of whether they are Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Jews etc. The Supreme Court Bench has further observed that "the mere fact that these words (Hindutva or Hinduism) are used in the speech would not bring in within the prohibition of sub-section (3) or (3A) of Section 123. It may well be that these words are used in the speech to promote secularism and to emphasise the way of life of the Indian People and the Indian culture or ethos, or to criticise the policy of any political party as discriminatory or intolerant. Whether a particular speech in which a reference is made to Hindutva and or Hinduism falls within the prohibition under sub-section (3) of (3A) of Section 123 is therefore a question of fact in each case."

Q. What do the above conclusions of the Supreme Court signify?

A. The above conclusions of the Supreme Court Bench clearly mean that if a candidate were to declare that he believed in Hindutva and therefore the voters should cast their votes in his favour, without saying anything more, he would not be committing any corrupt practice as defined by the Section 123(3(of the Act. He may, according to the Supreme Court Bench, be referring to the culture of the Indian people as a whole including Muslims, Christians and all other non-Hindu citizens.

Q. Can these conclusions be accepted as correct?

A. In the first place any statement made before an audience should be interpreted in the sense in which the members of the audience are expected to understand it. During an electoral campaign, the purpose of almost every meeting is to appeal for the votes of the electorate. Would the normal electorate in India understand that what is meant by Hindutva is the culture of all the people of India including those of non-Hindu faiths? Obvi-

ously, by Hindutva most of the voters would understand the culture of Hindus including their religions faith, and not the faith and culture of non-Hindus.

Even an audience more educated than the average Indian voters would understand by Hindutva the culture (including the religion) of Hindus and not of non-Hindus. It particular Hindutva cannot be understood by them as inclusive of the culture and religion of these whose religion arose outside India, such as Muslims, Christians and Jews.

It is well understood in anthropology that the culture of the people includes their religion, their language, their arts and crafts, their ways of earning a living and their behaviour with others. This means that culture includes religion, and that an appeal to vote on the basis of Hindutva includes an appeal to vote for the Hindu religion as well. Since an appeal to vote for Hindutva includes a appeal to vote for the Hindu religion, it clearly amounts to a corrupt practice as defined by Section 123(3) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.

Q. **From where has the present three Bench Judge derive the conclusion that Hindutva or Hinduism means the culture of all people of India (and not Hindus alone)?**

A. From the two previous decisions of five judge benches of the Supreme Court--Sastri Yagnapurushadji and Others vs. Muldas Bhudardas Vaishya and another, 1966 (3) SCR 242; and commissioner of Wealth Tax, Madras and Others vs Late R. Sridharan by LFs, 1976 (supp) SCR 478.

Q. **Do these judgements support the conclusion of the Supreme court that Hindutva or Hinduism means the culture of the people of India as a whole?**

A. No.

Q. **What was the observation made by the Supreme Court in Sastri Yagnapurushadji's case?**

A. In Sastri Yagnapurushadji's case, a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court held that Swaminarayan sect is a part of Hin-

du religion. It was observed in the judgement in that case that originally the word 'Hindu' arose from the river Indus and the residents around the river were called Hindus.

Q. Has that observation any relevance to what Hinduism or Hindutva means today?

A. That observation has hardly any relevance to what Hinduism or Hindutva means today. Moreover, the judgement in that case refers to many authorities and concludes that the Hindu religion does not claim any prophet, it does not worship any one God, it does not subscribe to any one dogma or believe in any one philosophical concept, it does not satisfy the traditional features of any religion or creed and that "it may broadly be described as a way of life and nothing more." The present three-judge Bench has relied on these and other observations in the aforesaid judgement and come to the conclusion that Hinduism is the way of life of all Indians.

In deriving this conclusion, the present three-judge Bench has overlooked the fact that the same judgement has also described what the essential features of the Hindu religion are. The judgement says, "Beneath the diversity of philosophic thoughts, concepts and ideas expressed by Hindu philosophers who started different philosophic schools, lie certain broad concepts which can be treated as basic." (p.263) The judgement in that case goes on to say that amongst these basic concepts is the acceptance of Veda as the highest authority in religious and philosophical matters and also the belief in rebirth and pre-existence. The judgement also mentions that according to the Hindu religion, the ultimate object of humanity is "the release and freedom from the unceasing cycle of births and rebirths; Moksha or Nirvana, which is the ultimate aim of Hindu religion and philosophy..." (P. 265) The judgement further says that Hindu religion "can be safely described as a way of life based on certain basic concepts to which we have already referred". (p. 265). These observations clearly mean that the Hindu religion, inspite of its diversity of doctrines, has some basic concepts which are common to all Hindus and which guide their way of

life. Obviously these concepts are different from those of Muslims, Christians and other religious communities. It is therefore not right to adduce from this judgement that Hinduism is the way of the present Indian citizens belonging to different religions.

Q. Can such conclusion be derived from the other case, the Commissioner of Wealth Tax and others?

A. No such conclusion can also be derived from the other case, the Commissioner of Wealth Tax and Others. In that case, a father and his son born from a Christian wife was held to form a joint Hindu family for the purposes of wealth tax. The extracts from authoritative texts quoted in this case also show that Hinduism is the civilisation of Hindus and it includes their religion and other cultural traits. Moreover, both this as well as the earlier case of Sastri Yagnapurushadji quote with approval the definition of Hindu religion given by B.G. Tilak in Geetarahasya which is as follows:

"Acceptance of the Vedas with reverence, recognition of the fact that the means or ways of salvation are diverse, and realisation of the truth that the number of Gods to be worshipped is large, that indeed is the distinguishing feature of Hindu religion."

It is clear that this case also does not support the conclusion of the three-judge Bench that Hindutva or Hinduism means the culture not only of Hindu but of the Indian people as a whole.

Q. Was the present three-judge Bench, therefore, wrong in holding that an appeal for votes based on Hindutva or Hinduism does not by itself amounts to a corrupt practice as defined to Section 123(3) of the Representation of the People Act, 1851?

A. Yes.

Q. In Manohar Joshi's case was it an admitted fact that in one of his elections speeches he said that "the first Hindu State will be established in Maharashtra"?

A. Yes.

Q. What does this statement of Mr. Manohar Joshi specify?

A. This clearly means that if the electorate voted in favour of Manohar Joshi and the other candidates of the Shiv Sena - BJP combine, they would establish a Hindu State in Maharashtra and that it will be the first Hindu State in any part of India. The voters who wanted a Hindu State were thus invited to vote for him and for the Shiv Sena-BJP combine.

Q. How did the Supreme Court interpret that statement?

A. The Supreme Court,however, held that this was not an appeal on the ground of religion. It observed: "In our opinion, a mere statement that the first Hindu State will be established in Maharashtra is by itself not in appeal for votes on the ground of religion, but the expression at best of such a hope."

Q. Is this decision supportable?

A. It is indeed very strange that the expression of the hope that the votes will succeed in creating a Hindu State in Maharashtra was not held by the Supreme Court to be an appeal to votes for the creation of such a State. The decision is unsupportable. As explained by the supreme Court itself in other cases, secularism means that while the people are entitled to profess, practice and propagate their religion, the State will have no religion of its own. An appeal for the creating of a Hindu State is obviously contrary to the principle of secular democracy and is a corrupt practice under Section 123(3) of the Act.

Q. What is the final criticism of Justice V.M. Tarkunde on the Supreme Court judgement?

A. "The decision of the Supreme Court Bench is highly derogatory to the principle of secular democracy and the letter and spirit of Section 123)3) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951. It is to be hoped that a larger Bench of the Supreme Court will on a future occasion reconsider these decisions and undo the great harm caused by them."[20]

c) Criticism of the Supreme Court Judgement by Justice Rajindar Sachar (retd)

Q. What are the critical comments on the Supreme Court jdugement made by Justice Rajinder Sachar, former Chief Justice of Delhi High Court?

A. In the *PUCL Bulletin* of February 1998 he made the following comments:

"The judgement of Supreme Court in election appeal of Mr. Manohar Joshi, Chief Minister of Maharashtra, over the electoral rule of `Hindutva' or even the appeal for setting up a Hindu State is a set-back to the secular philosophy of our Constitution.

The SC set aside the judgement of High Court by holding that it was a fallacy to assume that a speech in which reference is made to 'Hindutva' or Hinduism must be a speech on the ground of Hindu religion so that if a candidate by whom the speech is made happens to be Hindu, it must necessarily amounts to corrupt practices under Sub section (3). It also held that mere use of word 'Hindutva' or 'Hinduism' or mention of any other religion in an election speech does not bring it within the net of Sub Section (3).

The Court explained its conclusions by expounding in great detail the various shades of meaning of the word 'Hindutva' and 'Hinduism' and to emphasize the origin of the word 'Hindu' is derived from the river Sindhu; and that no precise meaning can be ascribed to the term 'Hindu', 'Hindutva' and 'Hinduism'; and no meaning in the abstract can confine it to the narrow limit of the religion alone, excluding the content of Indian culture and heritage. It also held that the term 'Hindutva' is related more to the way of life of the people in the subcontinent".

Now frankly if this meaning of Hinduism is to be explained in a theological treatise or in the philosophical content, no objection could be raised. But the problem is that the court was dealing with the matter in the context of an electoral corrupt

practice. Moreover, the cases relied upon by the court were distinguishable as they did not deal with the election law.

In that context it is well to remember that prior to 1961 in order to prove the corrupt practices within the Section 123 (3) systematic appeal to religion had to be proved. But parliament was compelled to amend 123 (3) because as per Statement of Objects and Reasons it was necessitated "for curbing communal and separatists tendencies in the country". Now even a single instance of appeal to vote on the ground of religion is a corrupt practice. Earlier the judgement of the court has emphasized that the "electoral campaigns on the line of caste and community are destructive of the country's integration and the concept of secular democracy which is the basis of our Constitution".

It is quiet patent that when Mr. Joshi talked of establishing Hindu state he was in no way trying to include the spirit of tolerance or spreading the message of Dr. Radhakrishnan as to what should be the rightful view of the life of Indians. He was fighting an electoral battle and directly asking for votes on the plank of Hindutva from an audience mainly of Hindus. He was unmistakably indicating that the Hindus will have special exalted place as against other religious groups. The audience I have no doubt, also understood the speech in this mundane and self serving purpose. The court itself was conscious of it when it commented that the speech has also not to be construed in the abstract or in the manner in which it would be conceived after an academic debate. This was also consistent with the views expressed in the earlier judgements that the effect on the speech is not to be tested when it is argued in the cold atmosphere of the judicial chamber, but with regard to the effect on the mind of an average voter. It had also cautioned that " inhibition of Section 123 (3) should not be permitted to be circumvented indirectly or by a circuitous or subtle devices".

If a Hindu candidate can thus avoid the qualification by quoting the philosophic content of Hinduism, the same result must follow if an appeal is made by the Muslim group in the name of Islam.

Now, all religions, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Sikhism are spiritual experiences of the highest order of their founders. The rituals may differ but the universalism of their moral values, the compassion and the truth of these and other religions are deserving of the same highest respect as those of Hinduism.

As is well known, Islam is an Arab word which means "submission to God, surrender, obedience". Islam also means peace. On the analogy of Joshi's case it would be permissible for a Muslim candidate to ask for the vote on the grounds of Islam by arguing that he is asking for the vote not on the ground of his religion but on ground for philosophy of peace and surrender to God which also is philosophy of Bhagwat Geeta. If that be the result, Section 123 (3) becomes a dead letter.

Already, Mr. L.K. Advani has felt bold to say that "India is not a Hindu state but it is a Hindu country and it is this which denoted the personality of the nation.

In my view to equate Hindutva as synonymous with Indianisation is to do violence to the ethos and elan of India which is an amalgam of multireligious and multicultural flowers with the distinctiveness of each but yet forming one harmonious garland giving out swept fragrance of the principle of unity in the diversity. In that it is well to emphasize the sagacious words of Dr. Radhakrishnan that "no one religion should be given preferential status or unique distinction and that no one religion should be accorded special privileges in national life." Gandhiji was even more direct when he said "separate religions--Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism--are different rights converging on the same period. The Allah of Muslim is the same as the God of Christians and Ishwara of Hindus."

I fear that this judgement may be used by communal parties on a licence to invoke religion in electoral battle. After all we cannot forget that the wanton demolition of Babri Mosque was the mischief of the so-called followers of Hindutva and of slogan shouting rabble "Say it with pride that we are Hindus."

It is essential therefore that law should be amended immediately to make it clear beyond doubt, that asking for vote by a candidate on the ground of his religion whether Hinduism, Islam, Christianity of Sukhism etc. will be deemed to be asking for vote on the ground of his religion and would be a corrupt practice within Section 123(3) of the Act. This must be done before the next general elections in 1996."[21]

d) Different Aspects of Hinduism

Nature of Hinduism

Q. What is Hinduism?

A. Hinduism, according to many religious scholars, is a civilisation, not a dogma. To discriminate against another, to attack another, to kill another, to destroy another's place of worship on the basis of his faith, is not part of Hindu *dharma*.[22]

Q. What is understood by the term "Hinduism"?

A. Hinduism, on the other hand, has nothing to do with a state system. Its concern is with an individual's soul, his inner being, his attainment of *moksha* by treading the razor's edge. It has no connection with the polity or with India as a *pitribhu* and *punyabhu* because a Hindu need not be an Indian at all. Indeed, he should be indifferent to the pleasures and pain of the material world if he imbibes the message of the *Bhagwad Gita* which, according to Radhakrishnan, "represents not any sect of Hinduism but Hinduism as a whole."[23]

Q. What are the specific assertions of genuine Hinduism?

A. Genuine Hinduism asserts that all ways of belief are equally valid, and Hindus readily venerate the saints and the sacred objects of other faiths. Truth is one, the Hindu believes, but there are many ways of attaining it.[24]

Scriptural Expressions of True Hinduism

Q. Where can be find scriptural expressions of true Hinduism?

A. To begin with, it must be noted that *punya-pra-kopa* (prophetic anger against adharma) is part of Hindu ethos as the follow-

ing Yajurvedic prayer shows: *manyurasi manyum mayi dhehi* (=You who are righteous anger personified give me the same). One of the basic teachings of the Gita is found in the repeated command of the Lord *mam anusmata yudhyacha* (Cf. 2:18,37;8:7) which means to fight against adharma with the Lord's help. Though the foreign traders and invaders abused the hospitality, broad mindedness and universal openness of Hinduism, it is not a religion which advocates tolerance of any nonsense.

The ancient Sanskrit sayings: *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (=the world is our family) *Atraiva vishvam bhavati ekanidam* (=the world as one nest for all mankind) and the Tamil saying *Yatum ourai, yavarum keli* (=in one place welfare for all) express the underlying world-family ideal of the Hindu ethos. This Hindu desire for universal welfare is found in the daily prayer *loka samastha sukhino bhavantu* (=May all be happy) and in the three-fold *Om shanti* blessings. The Gita injunctions of working for total welfare (*lokasangraha* cf. 3:20,25) and for the happiness of all beings (*sarva-bhuta=hite-ratah*, cf. 5:25 and 12:4) express the universal outlook and magnanimity of the Hindu ethos. The Gita asks the devotees to be compassionate and friendly to all beings (*adveshta sarvabhutanam mitraha karun evava* 12:13). The following two well-known verses which are attributed to Vyasji and which summarise much of Hindu attitudes to fellow humans can give us a glimpse of true Hindutva:

Slokardhen pravakshyami yaduktam shastra kotbhih. Atmanah pratikoolani napaesham samacharet (=I shall express through half of a verse what has been expressed through crores of sacred books: Do not do to others what you do not want othes do to you).

Ashtadas puraneshu Vyasasya vachanam dvayam Paropakarah punyaya papaya parapidanam(=The gist of all that is contained in the 18 puranas is contained in the following two sayings of Vyasji, there is virtue in the service of others and there is sin in doing harm to fellow humans).

As an outflow of this universal outlook and magnanimity of Hindu ethos there developed in India the concept of *sarvadharmasamabhav* propagated by the Father of the nation. The true interpretation is that as we love our religions so too I must respect and love the religions of others, and the wrong interpretation is that all the religions are the same. The following line from Gandhiji is enough to convey this issue: "But I can see clearly the time is coming when people belonging to different faiths will have the same regard for other faiths that they have for their own" (Selected Works, vol.6,p.268). This is an echo of what can be found in Ashoka's 12th stone edict: "Whoever honours his own religion and disparages another man's... does his own religion the greatest harm" (Theodore de Bary, Sources of Ind.Trad., p.151).

The root of this Hindu attitude is found in the Vedic statement that "To the Supreme One ages give many titles." (*Ekam sat, viprah bahudha vadanti*, Rig. 1:164:46). The Lord of the Gita teaches this ideal when He says:

Yepi anya devata bhkta yajante shradhayanvitah, tepi mameva, Kaunteya, yajanti avidhipurvakam (9:23, cf. 7:21) (=even those who lovingly devote themselves to other gods and sacrifice to them in deep faith, they really worship me though the rite may be different from the usual).

The following well-known verse in Bhagavat is another expression of the above Rigvedic dictum: *Akashat patitam toyam yatha gachati sagaram, Sarva deva namaskarah Keshavam pratigacchati* (=Just as the waters falling from the heavens (in thread-like draughts and scattered drops) flow into the same ocean so too the worship of the Divine in numerous forms reaches Me Kesava).[25]

Attractive Aspect of Hinduism

Q. What attract outsiders to Hinduism?

A. Hinduism has never claimed a monopoly or spiritual wisdom; that is what has made it so attractive to seekers from around the world. Its eclecticism is its strength. The rejection of other

forms of working, other ways of seeking the truth is profoundly un-Hindu, as well as being un-Indian.[26]

Hateful Aspects of Hinduism

Q. What is the most hateful aspect of Hinduism?

A. Social inequalities on the basis of caste is the most hateful aspect of Hinduism. In India one can change his religion but not caste.

Q. Is it not true that Hinduism and other religions in India have tolerated and even sanctified enormous injustice and inequality despite their commitment to an ethereal philosophy?

A. It is true that Hinduism and other religions in India have tolerated and even sanctified enormous injustice and inequality. None other than Swami Vivekananda pointed out that the central contradiction in Hinduism was its ethereal philosophy and its inhuman ritualism and social customs.[27]

Effect of Brahmanical Hinduism

Q. What is the effect of Brahmanical Hinduism based on birth label?

A. Turning Brahmanism into a label of birth has emptied it of all significance. The caste system has robbed the Indian society of its dynamism and has been mainly responsible for our successive subjugation by external forces. Like the licence raj that protected the monopoly of a few at the expense of many, the caste order, further crippled by fatalism has kept our life and society paralysed for centuries.

Hinduism and Tolerance

Q. Was Hinduism always a tolerant religion?

A. That Hinduism has had its core of tolerance owed a good deal to its origin in the rich Indus valley thousands of years ago. There were then no other rival religions to contend against and Hinduism had exclusively a big area like the Indian subcontinent where peaceful coexistence could naturally blossom.

It is not as if Hinduism has remained in its pristine purity for all these thousands of years. Ritualism, casteism and obscurantism had to be continuously fought by great souls like the Buddha, Mahavir, Nanak, Vivekananda and Swamy Dayanand.[28]

Q. **Is Hinduism intrinsically tolerant? Whose Hinduism? How did Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar attempt to manage the inner contradictions of Hinduism arising from inequitable caste system?**

A. Statements about an intrinsically tolerant Hindu society are not only trite but also seem ironical because of the inequitable caste system; Hinduism is tolerant within an essentially intolerant social system it has created. The disabilities Dalits suffer from, the social privileges and economic advantages upper castes enjoy, and the increasing tension between these two social groups, raise the moot question: whose Hinduism is the Congress talking about--upper or subaltern castes?

Indeed, the crisis of secularism in India is the crisis of Hinduism--and is closely linked with attempts to managing the tension in Hindu society. There was Mahatma Gandhi, who tried to sensitise upper castes to the injustices inflicted on the Untouchables, organized temple entry programmes, and lived and worked in Harijan bastis to counter the notion of purity and pollution. Yet Gandhi viewed the divinely ordained varna system essential for the harmony of society, and untouchability as only a perversion of pristine Hinduism.

In Gandhi's view, all varnas possessed equality of social status, but not equality of opportunity. Thus, in *Harijan* on March 6, 1937, he wrote: "One born a scavenger must earn his livelihood by being a scavenger, and then do whatever he likes. For a scavenger is as worthy of his hire as a lawyer or your President. This, according to me, is Hinduism". Gandhi's perception of Hindu society thus aimed at managing the inherent contradiction between upper and lower castes without questioning the extant power arrangement, and then uniting them to fight against British rule.

Opposed to Gandhi was B.R. Ambedkar's prescription for integrating the Untouchables into Indian society. Scathingly critical of what he perceived to be Gandhi's patronising attitude, Ambedkar wanted the depressed sections of society to educate and organise, and exploit modern political institutions to empower themselves. For Ambedkar, unlike Gandhi, equality meant not only equal status of the varnas, but also equal social and economic opportunity. He wanted to accentuate caste distinctions in order to create a society in which primordial identities would ultimately become irrelevant. And because caste disabilities derived sanction from Hindu scriptures, Ambedkar undertook the radical political action of burning the *Manusmriti* in 1927. His opposition to Hinduism culminated in his leading six lakh Mahars in Maharashtra to convert to Buddhism in 1956.[29]

Type of Hinduism Practised by Nehru and Gandhi

Q. What was the type of Hinduism practised by Nehru and Gandhi?

A. The man who best defined the Hindutva family's attitude to Jawaharlal Nehru was the president of the All-Indian Hindu Mahasabha in 1950, N.B. Khare. He called Jawaharlal "English by education, Muslim by culture and Hindu by accident." That year the revivalist lobby within the Congress successfully challenged Jawaharlal. Purushotham Das Tandon, who as chief of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh had kept urging Muslims to adopt a "Hindu culture," defeated Nehru's candidate Acharya Kripalani in the contest for leadership of the Indian National Congress. Nehru called it a victory of reactionaries and would not rest until he had obtained Tandon's resignation. When pragmatists advised Nehru that the Tandons represented a certain mood in the country and were best kept within the fold in view of the coming general elections, Nehru replied that he did not want a Congress victory at the cost of Congress' soul.

Jawaharlal Nehru's crime was actually a very simple one: he would not respond to the growing threat of Muslim fundamentalism by a corresponding Hindu fundamentalism. He did not

want the Congress to become a Hindu League in answer to the Muslim League. This left large sections of the evanescent political class either bewildered or angry or both. But Nehru had two imposing assets: a mentor called Mahatma Gandhi and the support of the people--most of whom of course, were Hindus. The Hindutva family was always uncertain about Gandhi, admiring (secretly) his Hindu asceticism, his visible faith in the Hindu doctrine: only a believer could die with "*He Ram*" on his lips. They never could reconcile this with the Gandhian philosophy that never lost sight of a virtual duty towards the minorities, a humanism that was a sacred trust as important as religion. Gandhi's Hinduism was humanism, and his humanism did not divide human beings into categories, whether over religion or caste. It was this faith that lay at the core of Jawaharlal's philosophy. Gandhism was his powerful shield, not because Gandhi was either a Mahatma or a martyr; but because Gandhi had articulated the essential faith of the Indian people and given it the power of a political and social force by his leadership. Gandhi made Jawaharlal his heir because he believed that the Hindus of India would understand and respond to the Hinduism of Nehru.

Jawaharlal himself was never shy of being called a Hindu: how could a man who was quite happy to use the prefix Pandit to his name be accused of denying his religious and cultural essence? Time and distance have made him Jawaharlal Nehru; while alive, he was only known as Pandit Nehru or Panditji, even in the headlines of the English press. Was this just a political appendage, a cynical gesture to keep Hindus happy? Unlikely, because Jawaharlal was not a hypocrite by nature or inclination. He had no qualms, in his beautiful last will and testament, about saying that he wanted his ashes immersed in the Ganga not because of its religious significance but because of the deep emotional bond he felt towards the river which had nourished him and his beloved India. "When I die, I should like my body to be cremated... The Ganga, especially, is the river of India, beloved of her people, round which are intertwined her racial memories, her hopes and fears, her songs and

triumphs, her victories and her defeats... Smiling and dancing in the morning sun--shadow fall; a narrow, slow and graceful stream in winter, and a vast roaring thing in the monsoon, broad-bosomed almost as the sea, and with something of the sea's power to destroy, the Ganga had been to me a symbol and a memory of the past of India, running into the present, and flowing on to the great ocean of the future."

Nehru wrote, and wrote beautifully. He wrote to his daughter from prison, letters that became the classic. And this is what Jawaharlal told Indira about the *Mahabharata*:

"Even apart from the philosophy of the Gita, it lays stress on ethical and moral principles in statecraft and life generally. Without this foundation of *dharma* there is no true happiness and society cannot hold together. The aim is social welfare, not the welfare of a particular group but of the whole world, for the entire world of mortals is a self-dependent organism. Yet *dharma* itself is relative and depends on the times and conditions prevailing, apart from some basic principles, such as adherence to truth, non-violence etc. These principles endure and do not change, but otherwise dharma, that amalgam of duties and responsibilities changes with the changing age... The *Mahabharata* is a rich storehouse in which we discover all manner of precious things... the teaching of the *Mahabharata* has been summed up in the phrase: 'Thou shalt not do to others what is disagreeable to thyself.' There is an emphasis on social welfare and this is noteworthy, for the tendency of the Indian mind is supposed to be in favour of individual perfection rather than social welfare. It says: 'Whatever is not conducive to social welfare or what ye are likely to be ashamed of, never do.' Again: 'Truth, self-control, asceticism, generosity, non-violence, constancy in virtue--these are the means of success, not caste or family.' 'Virtue is better than immortality and life.' 'True joy entails suffering.' There is a dig at the seeker after wealth.' And finally the injunction so typical of living and advancing people: 'Discontent is the spur of progress.'"

These are the words of a man who understood what he believed.[30]

Nature of Vedic Faith

Q. What was the characteristics of vedic faith and vision?

A. The vedic faith had a noble, dynamic and just social vision. As against the absolutisation of birth within the caste order, the *varna vyastha* that the vedas envisage, base itself on action, talent and aptitude (*Karuna, guna* and *swabhava*). This is clearly expounded in the "purush Sukta" of the Rigveda. It was further supported by Lord Krishna in the Gita, where he maintained (*natur, varyam, maya, srishta, gana, karma, Vibbagaslab*). It envisages a dynamic social order in which every individual is free to exercise himself/herself fully and attain maximum growth and fulfillment. It is a society characterised by equality of opportunity which is incompatible with birth-based privileges. Once *gunas* rather than birth becomes the basis for evaluation an individual becomes free to be a Brahmin or a Shudra[31(a)]

Harm Done to the Vedic Faith

Q. What the Sangh Parivar is doing to the vedic faith today?

A. The vedic faith is converted from a noble, dynamic and just social vision into an oppressive mechanism. This is done at the enormous cost to the *sanathan dharma*, turning it virtually into its opposite.[(b)]

Effect of Violence on Hinduism

Q. What would be the effects of practice of violence by Sangh Parivar with the name of defending Hinduism?

A. The more violence is practised to defend the caste system, the more Hinduism will get discredited on the eyes of the world and especially of the coming generations.[(c)]

Reason for Conversion

Q. What could be the reasons for conversion from Hindu religion?

A. The obvious fact is that the Dalits who were converted to other religions knew that they stood to lose much by way of material advantages as such as reservations. This should have prevented them from converting. In spite of this, thousands have embraced other faiths; it was entirely due to the oppressiveness of the caste order that denied them freedom, human rights and dignity.[d]

Ways to Show Hinduism in a Better Light

Q. What should be done today to show Hinduism in better light?

A. Its members must prove and improve their worth by deepening their social consciousness and human commitment. The Hindu community must emulate the examples of other religious groups in social work and work for people's empowerment. It must use the massive wealth accumulated in its temples or the money burned up on its festival days, to help and educate the poor.

To worship Saraswati it must launch an all-out war on illiteracy by starting schools and colleges with the resources it has. To honour Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, Hindus must burn less crackers and practice thrift. It must save its resources and set apart them in the religious context for humanitarian works. They must develop a passion for social reforms.[e]

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Tribals and Dalits are not Hindus

Q. Are tribals and dalits Hindus?

A. * The tribals have their own culture and history. They are born into their own peculiar religions. Article 25 guaranteeing freedom of conscience does not exclude the tribals from its purview. Like all other Indians, they have a right to embrace any religion of their choice. Even the census reports do not treat the tribal communities as Hindus.[32]

* "The leaders of these sects and the followers called their sects as part of Hindu religion. However, Christian and some 'secular' scholars question the census operation. It is

argued that adivasis are Animist and not Hindus [Raj 1994]. This is a ticklish issue, more so at this juncture when the Sangh Parivar is bent upon making India a 'Hindu Rashtra'. Notwithstanding the risks, one cannot brush aside the issue.

If Hinduism means the institutional four-fold Brahmanical social order, the model prescribed by *Manusmruti*, accepting Vedantic philosophy, etc., the adivasis are certainly not Hindus. Though adivasis have a notion of hierarchy based on status of ranking, the Dangis have not imbibed the values related to purity and pollution as understood and practised by caste Hindus. They do not consider themselves as belonging to one of the castes among the Hindus. Nor do they perceive their present position as adivasi as the result of their deeds of their past birth. Their social organisation, norms of interpersonal relationships and many of their customs related to marriage, child birth etc., are different in many ways from those of the caste Hindus of the adjoining areas. More important, caste Hindus do not consider adivasis as part of them. The adivasi is always looked down upon and placed outside the caste based social order. Any effort to bring the adivasi into the institutional and dominant Brahmanical ideological framework of Hinduism by conversion to Hinduism is only for political purpose. This process, following different trajectories, in fact, has a long history. It is now considered as natural and inevitable and is being systematically and aggressively carried out with state support, but not talked about.

However, if Hinduism means plurality of religious beliefs related to God and a supernatural power, worship in different ways to multiple gods and goddesses, nature and spirits and diverse rituals and beliefs about life and death, the overwhelming majority of the adivasis of Gujarat in general and the Dangs in particular may be called Hindus.[33]

* "Another important issue that the Sangh Parivar has refused to debate in the whole conversion debate is the religion of tribals and dalits. To assume that the tribals and

daltis are part of a Hindu caste monolithic is to take things for granted. The awakened and the aware among them claim that they are not Hindus at all. Their religion is centred on nature and ancestors. They are communitarians and do not believe in hierarchy. By conversion to a Hindu way of life what the Sangh Parivar is attempting to do is compelling the tribals and dalits to accept a way of life that is dehumanising and exploitative as 'untouchables and inferiors.' In the final analysis what is resisted by Sangh Parivar is the development of adivasis, tribals and dalits. The need is to expose the hidden agenda of the Sangh Parivar. That is why what has happened in Gujarat and other dalit and tribals belts is not local conflicts but a well planned out strategy to see that the social order does not change."[34]

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II: SANGH PARIVAR

Nature, Ideology, Strategies and Functions of Sangh Parivar
Organisations Under Sangh Parivar

Q. Which are the organisations and groups belonging to the Sangh Parivar?

A. The BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party)
The RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh)
The VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad)
The Bajrang Dal
The Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh
The Akil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP)
The Swadeshi Jagaran Manch
The Akil Bharatiya Karyakari Mandal

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RSS and its Works

Q. What is the nature of RSS and its works?

A. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is a 73-year-old organisation. Its members believe that "if you are not Hindu, you are anti-national and anyone who leaves Hinduism betrays the country." So they don't trust Muslims and Christians. Its members lead relief works during natural calamities but they also create a 'communal and vicious atmosphere when inter-religious tension arises.

Began in 1926 in the Central Indian city of Nagpur as an association of upper-caste Hindus the RSS now has some 40,000 branches and several affiliated organisations in the country.

Its 50 million members are reportedly divided among several splinter groups known as the "Sangh Parivar", or family of groups working for a Hindu nation.

'The Organiser' the RSS mouthpiece says the organisation has units in 178 countries with Britain leading with 53 branches followed by Myanmar.

The Indian government banned the RSS in 1948 after RSS sympathiser Naturam Godse killed Mahatma Gandhi. The second ban came during the internal emergency in 1975 and the third after the Ayodhya mosque demolition.

According to historian T. Ahmed, riots and inter-religious tension have 'greatly helped' RSS growth. RSS has specialist fronts to deal with all spheres of Indian life and has a stranglehold on the bureaucracy and the police.

RSS members reportedly attend evening sessions in which they are trained to handle weapons for "self-defence" and hear lectures on "atrocities against Hindus" and the need to protect Hinduism from "invaders."

According to P. Shukla, a Brahmin historian fighting RSS attempts to Hinduise Indian history, the BJP assuming power has emboldened the 'family" to campaign against Christians and Muslims.

RSS leaders say they copy the Church to counter Christian missionaries working in backward areas. They run some 15,000 service projects including school hostels and newsletters.

Confronted by the political opposition and feared by religious minorities, but hailed by present-day Indian rulers, the RSS continues its one-point agenda--to create a Hindu nation of India.[1]

Relationship Among Sangh Parivar

Q. How are BJP, RSS, VHP and Bajrang Dal related?

A. They all belong to one Parivar with a single ideology and common political priorities.

Q. What is the relationship between RSS and BJP?

A. Quite often the nature of the relationship that exists between the RSS and the BJP has assumed significance not only for these organisations but also for the public. Many fail to understand, leave alone appreciate, the subtle difference and distance that exists between the RSS and the BJP.

The BJP and the RSS have certain basic differences and aspirations precisely because the BJP is a political party whereas the RSS is a social organization. Naturally the BJP has certain constraints which the RSS does not have. Political compulsions and democratic polity force it to be more practical and liberal. So the BJP is forced to be tolerant of the pluralistic forces of society, which leads to it being moderate on every issue.

What is more, the RSS has approved the VHP's aggressive movement to liberate Krishna Janmabhoomi in Mathura as well as Kashi but the BJP has not been very happy with this agenda of the VHP, which wants the BJP to support the stir.

These apart, many pracharaks who joined the BJP have changed and do not stick to the austere ways of the RSS. As far as the earlier sense of morality and discipline is concerned, there is the absence of it in the BJP. Moreover, the RSS itself is led by a collective leadership including H.V. Sheshadri, K.s. Sudarshan besides Rajendra Singh, and this has led to the absence of a centralised direction.

Thus the relationship between the BJP and the RSS is a delicate one.[2]

Aim of Sangh Parivar

Q. What is the objective of the Sangh Parivar in mixing religion with politics?

A. Its objective is to organise all Hindus into one political community.

Q. What is its effect on the nation?

A. The explosive mix of religion and politics is creating new fears and antagonisms.

Strategies Used by RSS to Organise Hindus

Q. What are the present strategies used by the RSS to organise the Hindus?

A. * Campaign against Christian missionaries.

* Determination to build a Ram Temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya, even if the Supreme Court verdict goes against it.

Q. How is the mobilization of majority attempted by the Sangh Parivar?

A. Masking the rich tradition of plurality within the country the Sangh Parivar striving to fabricate a political majority based on one religious faith. It also tries to achieve this objective by invocation of cultural symbols and aggressive political demonstrations like *ratha yatra*.

National Identity of the Sangh Parivar

Q. What is the strident posture of Sangh Parivar on Hindutva issue?

A. The Sangh parivar's vague and ill-defined programmes that could weave together the Hindutva-Ram Rajya-Swadeshi axis. By attacking Muslims first and then Christians in Gujarat, the Hindutva group sends a signal across the country that they would continue to concentrate on strengthening their position by projecting that the national identity and Hindu identity were synonymous.[3]

Strategy to Counteract Challenges to the Caste System

Q. What was the strategy used by the Sangh Parivar to counteract the early challenges to the caste order?

A. Then the keepers of the system issued a call to 'semiticise' or Islamise Hinduism. This itself should have proved, that the agenda was a barely camouflaged project to protect the caste system. Rather than return to the vedic vision, it was found more palatable to term Hinduism into a replica of Islam or Christianity! The strange logic was that Hinduism could be protected by making it a counterfeit copy of its enemies.

The fact that the oppressed people in their thousands, Ambedkar and his followers being an example, have been forced to leave

his oppressive system should have awakened the keepers of the system to the need for reform. It did not. Instead, attempts have been made all along to lighten the chain of caste oppression and to arrest the process of social regeneration.[4]

Suppression of Bhakti cults of diverse Origins

Q. Were there attempts made by brahmins to subdue and submerge the struggle of self-asserting communities against its attempt to homogenise, reinterpret and control the diverse origins of bhakti cults?

A. Yes. Popular memories of tribals, egalitarian communities and of their aspirations for an enriched and expounded life of thriving interdependence kindled during the early years of the Mauryan empire, were subsequently subjugated, reinterpreted to justify a new hierarchical social order.

Q. What is the conviction of Sangh Parivar regarding Hindutva?

A. Sangh Parivar's conviction is that Hindutva is the bedrock of Indian nationalism and material identity.

No Difference Between Hinduism & Hindutva for Sangh Parivar

Q. For Sangh Parivar what is the difference between Hinduism and Hindutva?

A. For Sangh Parivar there is no difference between the two. Most people will also agree that they mean the same.

Factors Helped to Evolve a Communal Agenda

Q. What helped for Sangh Parivar to evolve a communal agenda in absolute opposition to the ideals enshrined in the Constitution of secular India?

A. The tragedy is that in independent India, no political party has as yet developed a powerful ideological movement to counter Sangh Parivar's rabid communalism.

The "non-communal" parties can evolve a long-term strategy--political as well as ideological--to combat communalism only

when these parties are free from the vices of casteism, linguism and regionalism which are as dangerous to the democratic social fabric of the nation as communalism.[5]

Sangh Parivar's Misunderstands of Hinduism

Q. Is Hinduism and its true nature misunderstood by the Sangh parivar?

A. What the Sangh Parivar and its partners in arms fail to recognise is that Hinduism is a very content religion. Hindus don't need to convert others, they have no evangelical zeal. Nor are Hindu gods jealous gods. In many Hindu families in Punjab, one son will be brought up as a Sikh while his brothers remain Hindus. Similarly, Hinduism is quite willing to accept that Jains, who revere Mahavir and the Tirthankars, have a right to worship Hindu gods as well. The Hindu view of the world is a self-satisfied one in which the superiority of the Hindu religion is taken for granted and, therefore, the worship of other gods is not seen as a threat.[6]

Sangh Parivar does nto Practice Genuine Hinduism

Q. Does Sangh Parivar practice genuine Hinduism?

A. Some say Sangh Parivar does not practice genuine Hinduism. But they practice pseudo-Hinduism. The Sangh is anti-secular. So the Sangh Parivar cannot help to establish the secular credentials of other religious communities.

RSS's Betrayal of the Country

Q. Are members of RSS true patriots? Did they betray the country during freedom struggle?

A. The RSS during the freedom struggle, instead of joining the movement, was busy expanding its area of influence by organising attacks on minorities as the great "Guruji" sermonised that participation in the freedom struggle only to rot in jails would be a sheer waste of time. That none of the present BJP leaders is a freedom fighter bears a testimony to it.[7]

Reasons for BJP's Meteoric Rise

Q. What was the major reason for the BJP's meteoric rise in the Indian political firmament?

A. A major reason for the BJP's meteoric rise in the Indian political firmament has been its successful peddling of certain key myths which has helped it set the terms of the political debate to its advantage. Time and again, the BJP with the organisational backing of the VHP, the RSS and the Bajrang Dal has played upon the susceptibilities of the Hindu voter by fuelling imaginary insecurities and building a sense of paranoia about the minorities and their rights in secular India. A particular tactical pattern is discernible in the political campaign of the Sangh Parivar which successfully catapulted the BJP to power. The most important part of the Sangh Parivar's strategy is the creation and use of several political myths by which the BJP manages to preserve its political legitimacy. The first of these myths is the so-called distance between the BJP and the Sangh Parivar. Yet as the BJP election manifesto made abundantly clear, Hindutva or majoritarianism was as much part of the BJP's worldview as of any other offshoot of the Sangh Parivar. The election manifesto made clear that "the BJP is convinced that Hindutva has immense potentiality to reenergise this nation and strengthen and discipline it to undertake the arduous task of nation building. This can and does trigger a higher level of patriotism that can transform the country to greater levels of efficiency and performance."

These words have a grotesque resonance today, considering the devastating effects of Hindutva-inspired "patriotism." Burned churches, murdered missionaries, ruined cricket pitches and terrorised minority citizens are testament to the "reengerising" capacities of Hindutva and its proclaimed potential for "nation-building." The resilence and integrity of the Indian nation-state have never been so sharply on test as they are now, with the doctrines of Hindutva enshrined as the ideology of the ruling establishment. There is very little to distinguish between the BJP's lauding of Hindutva's potential for stimulating patriotism and the applause of a Bal Thackeray or an Ashok Singhal

for the destructive vandalism of his followers. Thus when Shiv Sena thugs dig up cricket pitches or Bajrang Dal-VHP hoodlums ransack churches, these acts are actually glorified as the work of patriots. In what way does such self-proclaimed patriotism differ from the "patriotism" of the suicide bomber assassins of the LTTE and other such terrorist groups? Such a perverse appropriation of the concept of "patriotism" by the anti-social deviants of the Sangh Parivar is an inevitable consequence of the argument canvassed by the BJP and the Sangh Parivar that Indian nationalism is in effect Hindu nationalism. The BJP is today in power on the basis of its appeal to the majority community and a promise that the governing approach would recognise its dominance in civil society. It is this implicit commitment that has been seized upon by the Bajrang Dal and the Shiv Sena in their pogroms against the Muslim and Christian minorities which are designed to assert Hindu supremacy.

The second aspect of the BJP's strategy to seize the high ground ideologically is its ability to ensure that it constantly sets and re-sets the parameters of the political debate to its advantage, throwing its opponents perennially on the defensive. Thus before the shocking denouement of December 1992 when the Babri Masjid came crumbling down, revanchist frenzy was sought to be whipped up in the majority community on the basis of the emotional and irrelevant theme that temples were pulled down to build mosques centuries ago. It must be recognized that it was this revanchist frenzy which lent its fevered imagination to such theories as the appeasement and special treatment of minorities and laid the special treatment of minorities and laid the basis for the catastrophe of December 1992. If it were not for the pernicious doctrines sedulously propagated by the BJP, the VHP and the RSS, the destructive energies of the lumpen elements of the Bajrang Dal and the RSS would not have been unleashed and the tragedy of the demolition of the Babri Masjid could have been averted.[8]

Q. Why BJP ideology has become terribly painful in contemporary India?

A. The steady growth of what can be called the 'BJP phenomenon' is indeed worth examining. The BJP, as it has been repeatedly argued by the Leftists and the secularists, is not just another Rightist party. The fear is that it leads to the communalisation of civil society; it is determined to destroy the pluralistic ethos of the Indian society. For quiet sometime, the opponents of BJP have been reminding us of this danger, yet the intensity of BJP campaigning notwithstanding, the growth of BJP, as the election results suggests, remains an undisputed fact.

An ideology of this kind has become terribly powerful in contemporary India. The reason is that its two major opponents - Nehruvian secularism and Gandhian religiosity - are in crisis today. In post-independence India the Gandhian experiment was already marginalised. It was the Nehruvian agenda of nation building that, for quiet sometime, was the dominant ideology. It created a new dream : India - industrialised and secularised - fighting poverty, illiteracy and unemployment and bringing about socio-economic equality. However, the grand dream didn't materialise.

It was this disillusionment that led to the gradual erosion of Nehruvian/ Congress consensus. Furthermore, the growth of tribal/ethnic/regional movements challenged the centrality of Indian national state. In other words, in this fragmented social reality Indian nationalism found itself in the crisis. The BJP politics is essentially a response to this crisis. Its Hindutava is trying to create an alternate consensus; it is trying to replace Nehruvian secularism and giving a new meaning to Indian nationalism. Because of the dying Congress and the limited Leftist influence, there is no grand ideological system left that can pose a meaningful challenge to Hindutava and its cultural nationalism. [9]

Inability to See the Social Aspect of Religion

Q. What does the fanatical organisation such as VHP unable to see in religions?

A. They are unable to see that religion everywhere is a essentially a social organisation. It has little to do with spirituality which can only be sought on a personal basis.[10]

Signs of Abandoning Pluralistic and Secular Ethos

Q. What are the signs and manifestations that the Sangh Parivar is abandoning the pluralist and secular ethos of this country? What should be the political task of parties believing in secular ideology to challenge the BJP's present political dominance?

A. Just as in 1992, when the Hindutva chaunivists including leading elements within the BJP provided the underpinning for the destruction of the Babri Masjid and portraying it as a symbol of the alleged historic humiliation of the Hindu community, the BJP and its leaders are performing a similar task today, by calling for a "national debate" on the issue of conversions. If in the early '90s, mosques were seen as symbols of Hindu "humiliation" and the Muslim community became the target of Hindu fundamentalist frenzy, today the Christian missionary is the symbol of Hindu "subjugation" as the Christian community has become the latest victim of Hindu fundamentalist fury. That the BJP and its allies in the Sangh Parivar have no compunctions in promoting such hate campaigns, regardless of their devastating consequences for the future of this country, is an indication of the failure of the Opposition parties to effectively challenge the premises and assumptions on which the fundamentalists have sought to gain ground. The barbaric slaying of the Australian missionary and his sons by Bajrang Dal activists has evoked worldwide shock and outrage. It is time to recognise that such inhuman and depraved manifestations of a fascist mindset that are becoming increasingly frequent in India today are directly connected to the abandoning of a pluralist and secular ethos. Only when the Opposition parties, particularly the Congress (I), acknowledge that the primary politi-

cal task today is to repudiate vigorously the attempt to enshrine the hegemony of the majority community can the BJP's present political dominance be effectively challenged. Until such time that pluralist and secular values are reinstated as the basic ingredients of governance, India's civil society and the future of its nation-state will remain in grave jeopardy.[11]

Q. What are the comments made by Mrs. Neera Chandhoke on the approach of Sangh Parivar, in her work *State and Civil Society*?

A. Writing about the Sangh Parivar's approach in her recent work *State and Civil society*, Mrs. Neera Chandhoke comments: "The ideology is anti-democratic and totalitarian in every fundamental sense. It attempts to stifle Muslim aspiration or of other religious minorities to be free and equal citizens of India. It is antidemocratic because it denied Hindus the right to be the kind of Hindus they want to be. It is fascist not only because it is communal but because it attempts to pulverise all those intermediate institutions which can act as buffers for the individual. Hindutva thus threatens all liberal institutions, above all that of civil society... Within the politics of the Sangh parivar there is no room or vision for compromise or bargaining or negotiation, let alone respect for other political articulations and idealities. The Sangh Parivar believes in control of its own members, control of the state and control of society. It attempts to occupy all niches, that of the family, that of social associations, debates, discussions and the political agenda. It leaves little room for contestations and dialogues which are considered such an indispensable part of democracy." (P.242-243][12]

Sangh Parivar Disgracing Hinduism

Q. How do the champions of Hindutva traduced the values they pretend to uphold and disgrace the religion they claim to represent?

A. In practice, the champions of Hindutva have generally traduced the values they pretend to uphold and disgraced the

religion they claim to represent. There have been physical assaults on the minorities, as detailed, for example, in the Justice Srikrishna Report. They have been intimidated and terrorised as in the extraordinary increase in atrocities on Christians in states ruled by the forces of Hindutva, such as Gujarat, Maharashtra and U.P. as also in south Bihar where the BJP did well in the last Lok Sabha elections. Life, limb and property have been threatened. Insecurity has been deliberately spread. Worse, in many ways, is the denigration of beliefs and tenets of faith, caricaturing these to misrepresent them, drawing attention to aberrations to portray them as the norm, provoking disaffection contempt and loathing.[13]

Strategy to Appropriate People's Dreams and Memories

Q. What is the process adopted by the Sangh Parivar to promote its strategy of appropriation of people's dreams and memories?

A. The strategy of appropriation of people's dreams and memories involves reinterpretation of their histories, distortion of their folktales and disembodiment and rearrangement of their rituals and symbols. An important step in ensuring the viability of this sort of exercise is to monopolise the institutional mechanisms through which information comes to life as knowledge and is validated as officially acceptable and true.

Q. How does an organisation like Shiv Sena appropriate popular dreams and memories?

A. It evokes the image of Shivaji engraved in the memories of the people as a just and caring ruler and simultaneously manipulates aspirations, anxieties and memories of past struggles and at the same time shamelessly sustains and justifies a culture of extortion, terror, corruption and crime. The Shiv Sena has a great ability to justify its violence, as being in the interest of the common people.

Techniques Used for False Propaganda

Q. What is the techniques used by the Sangh Parivar to affirm or make people believe false propaganda of distorted truth?

A. The Sangh Parivar falsifying truths operates first and foremost in the realm of shaping, rather distorting ideas and discourse. Hindutva aided admirably by he myriad agencies spawned through the silent work of the RSS has mastered this technique and today is in the dominant position of having enjoyed masterful success in distorting discourse. Though this "secular" the secular is equaled with the Hindu, the Hindu with the national, the Muslim and now the Christian with the anti-national etc.[14]

Self Appointment as Guardian of Hinduism

Q. Is Sangh Parivar's self appointment as guardian of Hinduism accepted by Hindu religious authorities?

A. The Sangh parivar's self appointment as guardian of Hinduism has not been accepted by religious authorities such as the Shankaracharyas. Two Shankaracharyas were reported recently to have denounced the VHP for its misleading approach to Hinduism.[15]

Resposne of Hindu Leaders to Anti-Hindu Behaviour of Sangh Parivar

Q. What are the critical comments made by Hindu scholars regarding the anti-Hindu behaviours of Sangh Parivar in different situations in the recent past?

A. Swami Agnivesh expressed his agony in the context of imposing Sarasvativandana, in one of the most illiterate states of India: "I am worried that the political misappropriation of the mythology, ritual and symbolism of Hinduism will do enormous harm to this great and tolerant faith, that it will alter the profound treasures of this way of life beyond repair and recognition" ("Invoking Sarasvati Among the Un,lettered," *Times of India* 27.11.1998, p.10).

Dr. Karan Singh, one of the founding Fathers of the VHP has begun lamenting at the lawlessness and terrorism perpetrated by the Sangh Privar. He wrote: "It is tragic that the great universal ideals and values of Hinduism should be reduced to the digging up of cricket pitches and the vandalization of sports offices. Such actions in the name of Hinduism do grave disservice and injustice to one of the world's great religions." (*Times of India*, 23.1.99, p.10)

Mr. Kuldip Nayar wrote: "In fact during the 10-month rule of the BJP-led coalition, the country's plural fabric has been coming apart. Communal forces have been let loose... The philosophy of accommodation and tolerance that has inspired the nation is in tatters... The RSS parivar has been casting Hinduism into such a tight mould that it is getting defaced and defamed. Hinduism is pluralistic, compassionate, and accommodative, it can neither be monolithic nor restricted to one discipline, It is a way of life. This is its strong point which the RSS is determined to defeat." (*Indian Express*, Tuesday, 2.2.99, "The Right to Speak," p.6)

Another well-known columnist Prem Shankar Jha wrote in *Outlook*: "The murder of Graham Staines and his children is unforgivable... The damage our country has suffered is substantial and some of it may prove irreparable, for whatever traits the Hindus and Hinduism may have been known for extreme bigotory was not among them." ("For God's Sake Beware", February 8, 1999, p.32)

H.K. Dua wrote in the *Hindustan Times*: "The fundamentalist view of Hinduism... has always and rightly been rejected by India in the past. Hinduism's strength lies in its inherent plural nature, resilience in its beliefs, acceptance of freedom to worship different gods and respect and tolerance of other gods."("Not by Hated," 15.1.99, p.13)[16]

Q. Why is the Sangh Parivar criticised by Hindus and others?

A. The Sangh Parivar has been condemned--not because it is too Hindu but because its actions have nothing to do with Hinduism.[17]

Sangh Parivar's Similarity to Talibans

Q. Is the behaviour of Sangh Parivar and its constituents different from the fundamentalist Talibans of Afghanistan? How can such a behaviour create problems for India?

A. The constituents of the Sangh Parivar, including sections of the BJP, are behaving no differently from the Taliban, though the colour of their fundamentalism is saffron and not green. The depiction of the Holy Communion of the Christians as a permissible violation of the ban on the sale of liquor near places of worship, the attempted ban on school-girls wearing skirts, the removal of crosses on churches and the digging up of Christian graves has gone together with supporting the rejection of the Srikrishna report on the ground that it is anti-Hindu. These are just attempts at intimidating the minorities. It is nothing short of provoking them into protest action that could set many parts of India on fire. This would give the ISI and the CIA directors just the kind of opportunity they are looking for.[18]

Implications of BJP's Leadership

Q. What are the true implications of what the BJP's leadership of India stands for?

A. Claims that the BJP is not working towards a Hindu Rashtra militate against the horrifying reality that is unravelling in rural and urban India. Pogroms are now being systematically conducted against India's minority groups by the fundamentalist Hindu groups such as the Bajrang Dal, the leading role of which the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 is only too well known. The unprecedented assaults on minority groups and their places of worship that are taking place bring to mind the worst horrors of Nazi Germany and its anti-Semitic pogroms. Until the BJP came to power, bringing with it a new political ethos which unabashedly argued for an acknowledgement of the primacy of the Hindu majority, the Sangh Parivar had not dared to be so brazen about the anti-minority thrust of their political activity. In the eyes of the Sangh Parivar, the BJP's reign in New Delhi is the first step towards establishing a Hindu Rashtra.[19]

Wishful Thinking of Creating an Hindu Rashtra

Q. Is the desire (dream) of Sangh parivar to establish a 'Hindu rashtra' realisible?

A. One thing is perhaps certain that from today's perspective, establishment of the Hindu theocratic state in India is a remote possibility. The massive complexity and diversity of Indian society would make it difficult for all Hindutvavadi forces to unite in such a manner as to wipe off the entire legacy of democratic constitutionalism and pave the way for a Hindu state.[20]

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III: HINDUTVA

Hindutva Ideology of Sangh Parivar

Hindutva Ideology Developed by V.D. Savarkar

Q. What is the ideology of Hindutva developed by V.D. Savarkar in 1920 in Andaman jails?

A. Hindutva, as constructed by Savarkar refers to a history of the religious communities which regard Hindustan as their *pitribhoomi* (fatherland) and *punyabhoomi* (holyland). By this logic, Muslims, Christians and Parsis are excluded from that history for their *punyabhoomi* is not Hindustan. These communities are almost projected as aliens for their 'extra-territorial loyalties." Now the Hindu fundamentalists want them to give up "extra-territorial loyalties" and come into the Hindu fold, as if to be an Indian one is bound to be a Hindu.

Q. How did Savarkar construct Hindutva ideology in opposition to the Muslim communities?

A. Hindutva ideology has been constructed primarily in opposition to the Muslim communities of modern India. Ironically, Savarkar developed this divisive ideology when Hindu-Muslim unity was at its peak during the Khilafat period.

The purpose of Savarkar was to create an artificial divide by positioning a monolithic Muslim community in perpetual opposition to a monolithic Hindu community.

To achieve this objective, he reads history in his own way and glosses over the contradictions among the Hindu communities and project a militarised Hindu community.

Q. How does Savarkar appropriate into the Brahminical Hindu order the non-Brahminical faiths developed since post-vedic period--Jainism, Buddhism and 19th Century religious reform movements?

A. He does this by appropriating the peripheral aspects of these non-Brahminical ideologies and suppressing their essence."

According to Savarkar, religions like Buddhism, Jainism and Saivism share common ground with Hinduism. They owe their affiliation to a "common *rashtra*, common *jati* and a common *sanskriti*"--three principles of Hindutva.

He denotes the religion of the majority as the *Sanatan dharma* or Vedic *dharma,* Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Arya *dharma* and so on are refereed to as religions of the "remaining Hindus."

Savarkar says Hindu *dharma* as a generic term could be used to refer to the above communities for the Hindus and these minority religious communities represent a common civilisation. This is nothing but a violent encroachment into the identities of these religious communities. Savarkar's thinking can be understood by his construction of Buddhism. He praises Buddhism for having preached a universal religion and spread the glory of Hindustan throughout the world. But he does not recognise the initial critiques of the caste system evolved by the Buddha. The Buddhist concept of *karma* contested Brahminical pretensions of innate superiority and recognised the right of the lower caste people to enhance their status through noble action. The theory of "innate pollution" of lower caste people was challenged by Buddhism.[1(a)]

Q. Is Savarkar's claim, that the Aryans were the original inhabitants of Hindustan and they emerged as the race of the Hindus, a true claim based on historical facts?

A. No. The Vedas do not mention the word Hindus. The word Sindhu does figure in them. Savarkar says the Aryans, due to their linguistic peculiarity, pronounced the word Hindu as Sindhu. But then what prevented them from writing the word Hindu? The Vedic Aryans, were beef eaters sacrificed horses in the *yagnam*, and worshipped Indira. The Hindu trinity--Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva--was alien to their *dharma*. Savarkar conveniently suppresses these facts and calls the people of the Indus valley the first Hindus.[(b)]

Q. How do Savarkar and his ideological successors define the Indian nation?

A. Savarkar and his ideological successors define the Indian nation on the basis of the Hindutva principles--on a constructed unity of all those religious communities whose holy lands and fatherland lie in Hindustan. In his bid to forge an organic unity within the caste system, Savarkar suppresses the conflicts in the system. The Hindu nationalist call for removal of untouchability is mere rhetoric.

The effort to build *patitapabana mandir* for the Dalits is only a symbolic appeasement, a move to pre-empt Dalit demand for equal access to the temples.

Savarkar's Hindu nationalism completely ignored the anti-imperialist character of the Muslim masses. His plea for a strong Hindu nation, based on the principle of Hindutva, was aimed at establishing a Hindu state.

Savarkar's slogan of "Hinduise all politics and militarise Hindudom" exposes the myth of Hindu tolerance.[c]

Govindacharya's Concept of Indianisation of Religion

Q. What is the idea of K.N. Govindacharya on Indianisation of religion?

A. The present problem of conflict between religions can be solved by Indianisation of all religions. An Indian kind of Protestantism will evolve in due course because sectarianism is not in the ethos of this country. Exclusivist thinking must be shed. Slowly the transformation process will start, has started in fact, because the urge is innate in the Indian ethos. The end result of this will be Hindu Rashtra. If you accept that nation and state are not co-terminus, then, geo-culturally we are a Hindu nation. This is because a sense of belonging is embedded in the spirit of Hinduness, which, in turn, is the result of living together and sharing the same *sanskriti* for a millennia.

Hinduness will be common, even if the mode of worship is different. And that will motivate respect for all religions.

Hindu Rashtra or Hinduness also means Bharatiyata, Indianness. They are all synonymous.[2]

Hindutva Ideology of Golwalkar

Q. What is the ideology of Hindutva as propounded by Golwalkar in 1934?

A. In his book: "We or Our Nationhood Defined", he wrote: "The foreign races in Hindustan (read all Muslims and Christians) must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of the glorification of Hindu race and culture, i.e. of the Hindu nation and must lose their separate existence to merge to the Hindu race, or stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges far less any preferential treatment--not even citizen's rights. There is, at least should be, no other course for them to adopt."[3(a)]

Q. What is implied in the above formulations of Golwalkar?

A. Implied in these formulations in the crudest sense is that the "Muslims" and "Christians" are by faith and history outsiders. So are, of course, the vast majority of other Indians. Dalits and OBCs, who do not fit into definitions of culture, custom and religion as the rigid outfit sees it, though serious attempts have been made to give this ideology an all Hindu orientation.

Q. What is the basic agenda of this ideology in operation?

A. The basic agenda of this ideology in operation isclearly political to significantly alter and change the existing Indian democratic order through a demonising of the minorities.[(b)]

Nature and Content of Hindutva Ideology

Q. What is the nature and cotnents of Hindutva ideology of Sangh Parivar?

A. * Sangh Parivar's Hindu agenda has a political rather than religious meaning. It represents the world-view of cultural nationalism in underlying the concept of one people, one

culture and one nation. It denotes an oppressive philosophy favouring the obliteration of all cultures except that of Hindutva imposed by the majority community.

Cultural nationalism of the Sangh Parivar is a biased concept of a Hindu civilisational ethos. It challenges the pluralistic character of Indian nationalism and society.

* "Unlike Hinduism, Hindutva is an ideology of violence and anot merely a movement that happens to employ violence. This distinction is crucial. So an ideology of violence, it needs a hate-object to keep itself alive, and msut express itself through aggression and vandalism."[4]

* The ideology of Hindutva is basically fundamentalism and destructive of Nehruvian kideals of secularism and democracy. It derives its strength from one-sided, distorted view of history in which Muslims are seen as aggressors and the Hindus as victims. It advocates revenge and effacement of past history through the policy of hatred and violence towards the minority.

But the most omnious part of this ideology is the way it mobilised popular feelings for nation and natonalism. Operating within the framework of political life it completely recaste the Indian nationalism and subverts the foundation of democracy. For the Sangh Parivar democracy means a crude form of majoritarianism.

* Hindutva today is essentially an outfit of socio-economic fundamentalism that pretends to be an agent of Hindu (religious) revivalism.

* The Sangh Parivar's policics of Hindutva is pentently antidemocratic in the first place. It is totally against the spirit and ethos of Hinduism.[5]

★★★

* We should not have to wait any longer to discover that Hindutva is a regressive and reactionary movement. It has no vision or concern for the well being of the people. It is

blind to the opportunities and challenges of our times. Being defined by hate and violence, it is incapable of delivering the goods in governance.[6]

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* The political ideology of Hindutva framed by the Sangh Parivar is anti-democratic, anti-socialism and anti-secular. The egaliterian and violent thrusts of this ideology has spread through an aggressive pursuit of an 'us' verses 'they' politics.

★★★

Q. What is the difference between Hinduism and the Hindutva preached by the Sangh Parivar?

A. What the Sangh Parivar is preaching is not Hinduism but Hindutva. V.D. Savarkar wrote in 1923: "Hindutva is different from Hinduism." Hindutva is an ideology of hate and violence and an instrument of Brahmanical hegemony. But Hinduism is a religion. At a time when the rightists in the governments in the states and at the Centre are facing a political crisis, once again the Sangh Parivar has decided to use the Hindutva card for its political survival. It is a political weapon to spread intolerance. Violence is an integral part of RSS culture. RSS leader Mr. S. Golwalkar said in 1952 "violence should be used as a surgeon's knife...to cure the society."[7]

Q. How does Sangh Parivar's Hindutva differ from the Hindu dharma of all the Hindu saints?

A. Sangh Parivar's Hindutva believes in demolishing mosques and churches, curtailing the right to propagate one's faith, depriving minorities of their constitutional rights, abolishing Muslim Personal Law, etc. It is neither secular nor Hindu. Hindu saints like great religious leaders of Hinduism Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindu, Jiddu Krishnamurthy, etc. and Hindu religious organizations like Ramakrishna Mission, Prajapati Bhahmakumaris, etc. have been propagating the message of tolerance, peace-loving and non-violence. As a matter

of fact, the Hindutva of Sangh Parivar is quite different from the Hindu dharma of almost all the Hindu saints, thinkers and reformers. Overwhelming majority of Hindus reject Sangh Parivar's Hindutva. They subscribe to the Hindu philosophy of genuine Hindu saints as mentioned by Jagatguru Shankaracharya of Puri.[8]

Translation of Hindutva into a Superior Cultural Vision Impossible

Q. Can Hindutva, which asks everyone to consider Hinduism to be his or her defining ethos, translate itself into a superior and worthwhile cultural vision?

A. The answer is no, not only because it militates against reality but even more because the Hindu vision is a vision of backwardness. The intelligence that it breeds is ritualistic, conformist and subject to all sorts of collective monitoring in such a way that it fails to come to grips with reality. In its stead, what is offered are so-called moral values, mainly having to do with depictions of sexuality, with respect for traditional iconography.

In other words, the world outside is sealed off, which is one of the consequences of the brand of nationalism to which many in the Sangh Parivar subscribe. It is possible to believe in one's superiority against the overwhelming majority only if you have tested that conviction in reality and declared it true, not otherwise.

But if your cultural vision is based on the premise that India is the homeland of the Aryans, that the magical engines and deeds mentioned in the epics are literally true, that the cosmos is peopled with millions of deities and the nether-world with an equal number of demons, then your conviction can go and wash its feet in the Arabian Sea but not beyond.

The truth is that, Hinduism is untenable in three different ways: as a vision of the world, as a vision of the civilisation of this country, as a structure of society. Any cultural policy that comes out of it can breed only two things: hallucinations and infinite boredom.[9]

Arguments for Hinduisation of India

Q. What are the arguments put forward by the fundamentalist Hindutva forces in favour of Hinduisation of India?

A. They argue that Hindus constitute the majority community and their religious idom ought to provide the binding cultural cement for a variegated people. And that essence should be reflected in State education policies. They also insist that since Hindus are uniquely tolerant, the minorities have nothing to fear from a takeover of public spaces and official occasions by Hindu rituals, nor should they feel insecure if the nation is designated as Hindu. Saraswati Vandana and Vedas are, in any case, beautiful and profound, and all "pseudo-secularists" who object to their use by the state are anti-Hindus.

Q. Does this argument hold right in the context of secularism, democracy and citizenship rights?

A. Whether Hindus are tolerant or not is not the point here: no one can deny the Sangh Parivar's record of violent intolerance.

But much more is at issue: secularism, democracy and citizenship rights. In a multicultural democracy, the state and its associated offices and occasion have to be scrupulously non-denominational, not identified with any particular community to the exclusion of others. That is a very specific proposal that has nothing to do with the banishing of religion from social or public life. If the state affirms its affiliation to a particular denomination, the citizens belonging to other faiths or to no faith, would be relegated to a secondary status, and located at a greater distance from the state, upon which their claims would become correspondingly weaker. Again, in a democracy toleration cannot be a substitute for equal citizenship status. Toleration implies a relationship of power, where some tolerate others who are dependent, on sufferance. In a democracy, on the other hand, citizenship is a matter of right, irrespective of what section the citizen belong to.

If the nation designates itself as Hindu and the state acknowledges it in its official sphere, then non-Hindus will at best be tolerated as minorities not as equal citizens. Which is why,

Article 28 laid down that in government-funded schools, financed entirely by the state, there would not be religious ritual or instruction. In a multi-cultural society like India not all the myriad religious systems can be taught equally and to leave out any would indicate to school students that some religious communities are more important than others. In aided or recognized schools, on the other hand, the Constitution permits such instruction, but not on a compulsory basis.[10]

Hindutva and Barhaminic Mission

Q. Is 'Hindutva' a 'Barhaminic mission?

A. The RSS, in particular, has been dominated by upper caste Hindus and has had in more ways than one a 'Brahaminic' mission. It has been a mission both to provide the Indian State with a philosophy and a social purpose and enable it to acquire a strong and hard' body to itself. This was Natural Godse's mission and while not everyone in the RSS agreed with the means he adopted, namely the powerful symbolic act of physically removing Gandhi from the scene, there has not been much dilution in the basic perspective that he laid out when he defended himself in the court during the trial that led to his execution.[11]

Outlook of Communalism

Q. What is the outlook of communalism?

A. Communalism thrives on narrow and sectarian considerations. Instead of treating society as a community of citizens endowed with rights and freedoms it views citizens in terms of their religious beliefs and their belonging to majority or minority as rigid categories. The approach is divisive, inflexible and highly intolerant of diversity.[12]

Q. Do the overwhelming majority of Hindus subscribe to the philosophy of Hindutva?

A. The overwhelming majority of Hindus do not subscribe to the philosophy of Hindutva. They see Hindutva as un-Hindu. They prefer a secular India to a Hindu India.[13]

Q. What is the effect of the rise of Hindutva?

A. The rise of Hindutva, which I think is going to put us back by at least a century. We simply won't be able to think of ourselves as a modernising society because of all these impediments. Look at the articulation--you have a film like *Fire* and they go and break down a cinema house. Hussain paints a picture and they go and burn it. This is not modernisation. This is not even civilised living. This is barbaric because it terrorise society and prevents creative expression.[14]

Q. What are the factors which have made the religious nationalists acceptable and popular compare to the secularists?

A. The earlier discourse on secularism was constructed around modern liberal democratic state which was positioned on the general principle of equality of treatment of all. Of late, the secularists have been promoting the post-modernists discourse which denies the logic of monolithic liberal state. In the post-modernist vein, some of them have been arguing against the common civil code. This has had a baffling effect on the common man. To him, religious nationalism appears more definite and consistent in its argument. Secular ideology is found to be cold and distant which does not touch life in its entirety while the religious nationalists take care of the social-cultural needs of the community. Their activists are visible on many occasions of need and the common man has several opportunities to meet religious nationalists in the day to day life which is certainly not the case with secularists. Public relations activities have indeed made the religious nationalists acceptable and popular.[15(a)]

Q. What are the factors which have contributed to the growth of Hindu nationalism in India?

A. Hindu nationalism in India is not a new phenomenon to be explained away as a sudden malignant growth of primordial sentiments. Religious nationalism is a complex phenomenon and both the past history and the complex current history contribute to it in a big way. As observed earlier, religious nationalism is built on previous construction of religious commu-

nity. Several scholarly works point out how the colonial society had contributed to the formation of distinct Hindu and Muslim identities. It was not merely the question of 'divide and rule', or politics of imperialism as often it is made out to be but even secular processes of administration contributed to such identity formation. The census operation and counting of Hindus, Muslims, Christians separately, the clearcut division between the Hindu and Muhammadan law; and the Orientalist discourse which viewed India with adulation and sometimes even with awe as an ancient Hindu civilisation and stressed the common Indo-European roots of Hindu and western civilization - all have contributed to Hindu identity formation.

Interaction with the colonial rule and the Orientalist discourse both found their way into socio-religious reform movements of the Hindus and Muslims. The creation of 'Neo-Hindu' and 'Neo-Muslim' movements, the need to reform the Hindu society to purge out its weaknesses have helped in the formation and consolidation of separate identities. These communal identities soon got politically polarised with the advancement of the freedom movement and constitutional reform in India. Both the Muslim League (1906) and the Hindu Mahasabha tried to gain political mileage and power using the democratic process.

With independence, the need to create a strong modern independent India compelled the modernising elite to push back the memories of this legacy consciously and firmly and to create a new discourse on nationalism selecting only the modern and secular strands from the legacy of the freedom movement.

The holocaust of partition and India's relations with Pakistan still continue to define the political discourse in India. The creation of a sovereign independent Islamic state, at the end of the long-term freedom struggle was an indication of the success of two nations theory. It has created a deep suspicion about Muslims in India and has been a source of India's agony over relations between the two major religious communities in the country. India's turbulent relationship with Pakistan has kept the hate war between the two communities not merely

alive but has enlarged it ten-fold. It is easy for Hindu nationalists to perpetuate their ideology by playing upon Hindu suspicion of Muslim loyalty to India and by keeping the hope for Akhand Bharat alive time and again.

It would be incorrect to confine explanations for the evolution of Hindu nationalism to historical and sociological forces alone. Indian politics for the past fifty years by its very nature has contributed immensely to the growth of this ideology. The crisis of governability has dealt a severe blow to the legitimacy of democratic political order over a period of time. Democratic politics believes in institutionalism of authority, when the institutions are undermined their capacity to deal with conflicts and initiate solutions declines radically. Changing patterns of recruitment and role of the political elite, uneven economic development, mobilisation of new groups for electoral politics and formation of private armies, growing social unrest are all indications of the crisis of the Indian state. The near elimination of the congress Party's hegemonic role in the system has left a political void which is yet to be filled in by a suitable alternative. The crisis of the Congress became the crisis of the state itself. This political space has been appropriated by the rightist parties to a large extent through the game of competitive populism. Atul Kohli points out that the nature of a highly interventionist state as in India is such that it politicises all forms of societal cleavages--economic, social and religious.[b]

Q. To what factors can we attribute the success of the spread of Hindutva political ideology?

A. 1) The organisational and manipulative skills of Sangh Parivar.

2) The socio-economic changes in independent India.

3) The multi-pronged project of Hindutva to create a political constituency through the manipulation of a majoritarian and homogenised Hindu identity.

Q. What is the cause of resurgence of Hindutva and Hindu nationalism and how does differ from Indian nationalism?

A. There is a resurgence of Hindutva and Hindu nationalism for a variety of reasons. At one level it is power-hungry groups that want to come to power and they are using an ideology of a restricted nationalism in order to do that. There is an understanding that nationalism that can be successful will lead a group to power. For example, Indian nationalism. Indian nationalism was anti-colonial, it was successful, it led the Indian middle class to power.

Hindu nationalism is arguing the same thing. That if it is successful, it will also lead its supporters to power. But it is a different set of people. The social component of Hindu nationalism is different from what was the social component of Indian nationalism.

Another reason is that in moments of tremendous social change, people who are in potential areas of power often feel very insecure--will they make it or won't they make it? So there is a turning to some easy ideology which will quickly mobilise large numbers of people. This is another reason for the rise of Hindu nationalism.

Another explanation is that an economic policy like globalisation, in which the whole world is involved, also brings with it the insecurity and competition of multinationals coming in and taking over the economy. There is a turning to a sense of swadeshi. This is distorted into talk of "swadeshi economics" and "swadeshi politics", without understanding that what is really required in this process of change is to fully understand the problems of Indian society and economy.

Instead of just replacing one ruling class with another or one ruling group with another, we really have to learn how to distribute our wealth, distribute our social concerns so that the whole of society moves. Otherwise, all that we are doing is moving a Hindu nationalist into where an Indian nationalist was before. In addition to moving in, he is also distorting Indian culture and Indian history and producing a rather warped Indian as a result.[16]

Q. What is the effect of ideologies and organisations that promote communalism and casteism in India?

A. "Ideologies and organisations that promote communalism and casteism, irrespective of the colour of their flags assault the concept of India as one nation, which is the common home for all its citizens belonging to all castes and faiths. In this context, I would like to state emphatically that both minority communalism and majority communalism weaken our unity and must be stunned."[17]

Q. How does the Hindutva brigade affect genuine Hinduism?

A. The Hindutva brigade is being untrue both to Hinduism and to Indian nationalism.

Q. What is the effect of the majoritarian political ethos that the BJP espouses?

A. The dangerous consequences of insidious arguments that India's governance has been "too secular" and "appeasionist of minorities" should now be clear to those who insisted that the BJP's primary political appeal was its emphasis on clean and stable Government as opposed to the corruption and the lack of durability of governments run by the "secular parties." The thesis that the BJP was just a right-wing party anchored to political values emphasising pragmatic conservatism rather than a front organisation for the avowedly fundamentalist Sangh Parivar had enhanced its saleability to middle-class voters, including many with cosmopolitan values. But in the light of the complete transformation of India's political and social context, including the brazen assault on basic norms such as the obligation to preserve the peaceful coexistence of different social groups and communities, it is time to face the uncomfortable reality that the majoritarian political ethos that the BJP espouses has paved the ground for much of the destruction and havoc that have damaged India as a civil society and as a nation.[18]

Q. What will be the consequence of declaring India as a Hindu rashtra?

A. It does not require much imagination to realise that the call for declaring India a Hindu rashtra is a prescription for plunging the country into chaos.

It is an abuse of language to call the demand for a Hindu rashtra a programme. It is more a symptom of the pathology of a fundamentalist creed completely unaware of the realities of political life at home, the international situation, the repercussions of provoking new militancies in a society already unable to deal effectively with a hot of small insurgencies, and the exorbitant cost of earning the hostility of the world community. It is no accident that most fundamentalist movements in recent years, though paradoxically a byproduct of the ills of modernity, have been conspicuous by their denial of democratic freedoms to their people and their failure to provide better living conditions for them.

Danger signals have of late been coming from several places in the country about the way an explosive mix of religion and politics is creating new fears and antagonisms.[19]

Q. In what way the Hindu nationalisms glorification of organic unity of the nation suppresses diversity?

A. The inclusionary charter of Hindu nationalism glorifies organic unity of the nation and repudiates and suppresses diversity (or is seen more as discord) which means denial of cleavages, oppression and therefore conflict in the society. Hindu nationalism has grown in a situation in which "the failure to assure substantive democracy and equitable development for significant segments of civil society has resulted in the discrediting and delegitimising of state sponsored nationalism. Among the most dramatic manifestations of this have been conflicts along lines of class, caste and community a well as claims of distinctiveness and at times sovereign national status, put forward by a variety of disenchanted social groups at the regional and sub-regional levels." Hindu nationalism's bulldozing unit refuses to see the validity of distinctiveness of demands of the depressed communities, tribals and the OBCs and the need to protect them in a reasonable way. The rejection of plurality

both inside and outside of Hindu society and the rhetoric of the "we vs they" has made it intolerant of differences, not only social or religious but even intellectual.

The all-inclusionary ethos of religious nationalism is not conducive to individualism and individual freedom, especially right to freedom of speech and expression. Religious nationalists often tend to carry the values of communal life to an extreme. They cherish the group of loyalties over individual rights and achievements.[20]

Q. What is wrong with the principle of homogenisation?

A. Surely, the insistence that everyone must conform to one's own pattern and tradition, and that what is at variance with one's own persuasions must be rooted out, in a sign of spiritual and emotional deficiency, rather than of religious vitality. The principle of homogenization is contrary to the logic of nature, history and spirituality, irrespective of the religious or cultural spheres in which it operates. Nature, if homogenized, becomes a wilderness! History homogenized can only be a playback of pure determinism, with no scope for either evolution or revolution.

Heterogeneity, rather than homogeneity, is the logic of life.

It is surprising that millions of educated Indians, who claim to cherish the 'great and enduring heritage of India,' fail to see that the war-cry of "One nation, one culture, one people" is a frontal challenge to the pluralistic and tolerant nature of the heritage they process to cherish.[21]

Q. What is the attitude of religious nationalism towards women?

A. Religious nationalism celebrates the vitality of manhood, its organisations tend to be largely male dominated though a couple of high profile women activities could be accommodated as tokenism. In recently held organisational 'elections' in the Shiv Sena, there is no woman among the 14 leaders and 17 deputy leaders. Traditional duties of women are eulogised repeatedly and a modern liberated woman is seen as a threat to family,

society and culture. This creates an ethos which is both chauvinistic and paternalistic and leads to shrinking of the social space and domain of women over a period of time.[22(a)]

Q. What is the relationship between religious nationalism and violence?

A. There is a close relationship between religious nationalism and instances of increasing violence. Religion has been exploited by political actors to justify the employment of violence. Violence in the name of religion sanctifies homicide and acquires legitimacy which it did not possess previously. In the last few years, communal killings in India have become more planned, programmatic and are executed with deftness. In fact, communal violence has acquired characteristics of terrorism in some measure.[(b)]

Q. What is the history of communalisation of Indian society?

A. "The communalisation of Indian society is not a recent phenomenon. It began in the second half of the nineteenth century with the formation of a communally antagonistic consciousness, aided and abetted by the colonial rulers. It took institutional form only in the twentieth century when political and cultural organisations drawing upon communal identities came into existence. Despite the success of the Muslim League in mobilizing the Muslims, the efforts of the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS to rally the Hindus in the name of religion had very marginal success till 1947. Even after independence, they did not make much of a head way. But in the recent past, particularly during the last five years, there was a sudden upswing of Hindu communalism and it managed to penetrate into the different segments of the society. The communal forces have brought to being a network of political and cultural organisations that ensures a Hindu communal presence in all spheres of activity.

The forces of Hindutva, as Jayant Lele has argued, "succeeded in making communalism the central question for Indian politics in the 1990s." This was achieved by the invocation of the

symbol of Ram and an aggressive political mobilization around the construction of a temple at Ayodhya. Within a short span of time the Hindutva message resonated in the minds of a large number of Hindus across the sub-continent. The Hindu communal argument aroused acceptance in an unprecedented manner. It even led to the destruction of the Babri Masjid without practically any resistance from the Indian state. Despite the Bharatiya Janata Party loosing the election in Uttar Pradesh, the Hindutva idea has been firmly embedded in society and its political potential continues to be powerful. The success of the 'saffronised' Shiv Sena and the BJP in Maharashtra and Gujarat belie the argument that the "Hindu bubble" has burst.[23]

Q. What are the contradictions of Hindutva?

A. Ironically, Hindutva is the very embodiment of this "unforgiving spirit". The irony here is two-fold. In the first place, its grudges are based largely on imaginary grievances. Secondly, it is the absolute embodiment of negativity. It is not an accident that the protagonists of Hindutva do not have any positive programmes or constructive vision for the country. Their energies are all negatively and destructively defined.

The real issue is that Hindutva portends a total crippling of our national energies by its unforgiving malicious and hate-obsessed spirit and outlook.[24]

Q. What creates opposition to the concept of Hindutva?

A. Opposition to the concept of Hindutva stems from the impression that it constitutes the essence of a reductionist, majoritarian and aggressive Hinduism which projects the figure of Ram as the epitome of its human ideal and which seeks to compel all Indians to conform to the way of life it prescribes. Assertions such as the one that "The BJP is committed to the conception of One Nation, One People, One Culture" in the party's manifesto for the 1998 Lok Sabha polls, aggravate matters. In a country celebrated for its cultural eclecticism and diversity, it has the ominous resonance of a slogan for intolerant cultural conformity.[25]

Hindutva Vs. Constitutional Ideology

Q. Is this 'Hindutva' concept in accordance with the principles of a modern democratic India?

A. It is evident that this is primitive, tribal attitude, harking back to the medieval ages. Such concepts have no place in a modern society where citizens are not given passports on the basis of their race or rituals. Besides, all citizens are equal in a modern country, irrespective of whether their holy day is Sunday or Tuesday or Friday. Clearly, therefore, Hindutva cannot be an effective guarantor of secularism, for a secular state makes no distinction between individuals on the grounds of race or religion or any other factor. Hindutva is a prescription for a theocracy.[26]

Q. What is the content of Sangh parivar's ideology and how will it affect the building of a modern India envisaged by the framers of the Constitution?

A. The ideology of Sangh Parivar--whether hidden or exposed--is known to everyone. They summarise it in the apparently beautiful slogan--"One Nation One Culture." The "one nation" for them is the Hindu Rashtra, "one culture" for them is the Hindu culture.

The concept of "one nation one culture' is against the very spirit of the Constitution of the country. All the distinct religious, linguistic and cultural variations are accommodated and given sanctity and safety by the Constitution. All these various streams flow towards the ocean of ONENESS or "INDIANESS." But the Sangh Parivar is engaged in draining the various streams and preserving the ocean alone which is against the very natural and moral law. The concept of Hindu Rashtra is an Utopian ideal which can be accomplished only after eliminating nearly twenty percent of Indian population, which in any sense is absurd.[27]

Q. Has the Sangh parivar the ambition to change the Constitution?

A. The Sangh Parivar has the ambition to change the Constitution to achieve its goal of promoting religious nationalism. The certain present provisions of the Constitution containing secularist principles are stumbling block for promoting its hidden agenda of creating a Hindu rashtra.

★★★

Q. What factors must be studied and analysed in the historical development of the Hindutva concept and ideology?

A. Regardless of the success and failures of the Hindutva forces, one must concede that they have succeeded in making communalism the central question for Indian politics in the 1990s. This rejuvenation and rapid ascendance of an ideology that lived a marginalised and subterranean existence during the colonial and Nehru eras, demands careful and nuanced analysis. This fact that it was subterranean does not mean, however, that it was ineffective. The partition of 1947 and the communal holocaust that followed are a clear evidence of its potency. What is unique and distinct is the overt, widespread legitimacy acquired by its message, across the rural landscape and among constituencies that had formerly treated it as a brahmin conspiracy.[28]

Q. Has the Hindutva programme become the programme of Government of India?

A. The Hindutva programme is still to become the programme of the Government of India. The ruling coalition has consciously rejected the Hindutva agenda; the BJP itself has put it on the backburner. And there lies the rub. For the biggest threat to the government comes less from the allies or even the Opposition than from the growing rift between the political rank and the ideological file of the Sangh Parivar.[29]

Hindutva & Swami Vivekananda

Q. Has the Sangh parivar "hijacked' Vivekananda with an attempt to project him as a "campaign of militant Hinduism"?

A. The Sangh parivar has "hijacked" Vivekananda with an attempt to project him as a "champion of militant Hinduism." They have linked their concept of Hinduism with the "messages" of Vivekananda, thereby recasting the public discourse on Swamiji to such an extent that Vivekananda becomes illegitimate in the context of modern conditions that shape India's united and democratic consciousness.[30(a)]

Q. Why did Swami Vivekananda want to give a religious-cultural background to the Indian nationality like the German patriots? Is the German situation applicable in India today?

A. Yes. But the case of Germany was different. One can justify the gradual development of cultural ideology of "Deutschtum" and cultural definition of nationality simply because of the division of Germany into different states. The Germans were scattered and remained outside the boundaries of the Fatherland. It was also a very popular practice with the Greeks, Italian, Irish, Indonesian and even the Soviet leadership in the 19th and 20th century to use religion and traditional religious-cultural idioms or the glorification of the past in order to reach the people with the new ideology of nationalism.

But in India, not only Muslims but even Sikhs and Brahmins refused to call themselves Hindus, which made it impossible to bring all Indians within the boundaries of Hindu nationality.India, being a multi-religious, multi-caste and multi-cultural country, could not afford to take the identity of any one religion, caste, culture, or historical tradition.

However, all great men think well ahead of their times. And Vivekananda being a great thinker could not have aimed at a united India on the basis of Hinduistic Vedanta. Time and again it has been proved that religion cannot be a basis for nationality in the modern sense.[(b)]

Q. What did Swami Vivekananda mean when he said, "national union in India must be gathering up of its scattered spiritual force. A nation in India must be a union of those whose hearts bear to the same spiritual tune"?

A. These lines are bound to confuse you if you draw any hasty conclusions regarding the significance of these words. Vivekananda, according to one of his friends and admirers, was a man of "striking contrasts and moods of infinite variety, which confounded even his friends at times. So those who interpret his dream of national unity by citing reference from Indo-Aryan religious experiences are bound to be confused.

The idea of a nation in the modern sense is certainly different from the attempt of a group of people who are used to form a clan around some totem and bind themselves to certain rites, ceremonies and taboos in connection with the same in ancient Indian society.

Moreover, it is impossible to execute the alleged plan of Swamiji to unite all Indians under the banner of Hinduistic Vedanta due to modern conditions. At best, one can claim that Vivekananda visualised India's history of culture which was uninterrupted despite Scythian or Kushan, Turkish or Mughal rule as one and indivisible. India's cultural evolution is still in progress. It is absolutely false to claim that the cultural basis of India, politically a nation today, has already been evolved out of the historical and materialistic conditions of the time.

But Vivekananda has been painted a religious paranoic. True, he wanted to revitalise Hinduism by putting it in a new and modern setting. But above all, he was a great believer of potential divinity in every human. The absurd religious approach of the blind votaries of Hindutva to the country's basic problems is in Swamiji's words "feeding the masses with stuff and nonsense!" He was aware that people with vested interests were ever ready to use religion as a weapon for exploiting the masses of India. He gave the clarion call to stir the moribund Hindu society, not to inflict demoniacal and a brutal attacks on the minorities of India, but to strive to build a society where human dignity would be fully respected.[c]

Q. The Sangh parivar has been trying to defend religious chauvinism by using Swamiji's prophetic vision about the future .

of India. But how did Swamiji himself interpret Indian history?

A. In his words, "Here are the Persian, the Greek, the Yunchi, the Hun, the Chin, the Scythian and many more, the Jews, Paris, Arabs, Mongols... an ocean of humanity composed of these race waves, seething, boiling, struggling constantly changing forms, rising to the surface and spreading and swallowing little ones, again subsiding--this is the history of India."[d]

Q. **Vivekananda observed that "the unity in religion, therefore, is absolutely necessary as the first condition of the future of India. There must be the recognition of one religion throughout the length and breadth of this land." The votaries of Hindutva usually uphold the above observations of Swamiji to prove their point that is Hinduism. What is the true interpretation of Swamijis observation?**

A. Those who want to emphasise that the basis of a homogeneous nationality in India should be Hinduism since Swamiji believed in "recognition of one religion" and "unification of religion", clearly miss the point that their interpretation actually brings Swamiji's ideas in conflict with the principle of forming a nation on the basis of "communities of interest and fate."

The interpretation of his "unification of religion" has been given in his biography published from the Advaita Ashram: "He felt that different religious ideals should be a matter of personal realisation, never being permitted to affect the affairs of state... he felt that with the recognition of the deeper elements of truth, all sectarian bitterness would die out and all would join hands in the common task of restating and remodeling, according to modern needs, the contents of the ancient Indian culture." And what was this ancient Indian culture? Was it a Hindu culture?

If we go through Vivekananda's sociological views, we find that he was against calling the descendants of Vedic Aryas, Hindus. Indian culture, therefore, to Swamiji, was Indo-Aryan culture where, down the age, outside influences crept in. Swamiji's Indo-Aryan culture was actually India's composite

and pluralistic culture. Out of the melting pot called India emerged the people called Indians. His sociological views suggest that the people of India should call themselves Aryans since "We are all Aryans irrespective of caste, colour or creed... self-respect demands that we assert ourselves as Aryans."

So either it is a willful distortion of the past or inadequate understanding of Vivekananda when the Sangh Parivar projects Swamiji's Indianess as a defence of everything connected with their brand of Hindutva.

Vivekananda wanted to unite India under a "dynamic and aggressive" religion. But he was no Guru Golwalkar who wrote in 1939 that "Only a Hind could be a true Indian... In this country, Hindus alone are the nation and the Muslims and others, if not actually anti-national, are at least outside the body of the nation." Long before that, Vivekananda had written from Chicago in 1894: "We reject none, neither theist, nor pantheist, monist, polytheist, agnostic nor atheist, the only condition of being a disciple is modelling a character at once the broadest and most intense... we leave everybody free to know, select and follow whatever suits and helps him."

Vivekananda always admired the democratic and aggressive spirit in Islam and wanted Hinduism to be infused with this spirit and to be permeated with democratic and egalitarian social polity as envisaged by Islam.

He wrote: "Our experience is that if ever the followers of any religion approach this equality in an appreciable degree in the plane of practical work-a-day life... It is those of Islam and Islam alone. Therefore, we are firmly persuaded that without the help of practical Islam, theories of Vedantism... are entirely valueless to the vast mass of mankind... For our own motherland a junction of the two great systems--Hinduism and Islam--Vedanta brain and Islam body--is the only hope."

In fact, both Swami Vivekananda and Swami Dayananda wanted to give a new monotheistic interpretation of the *Vedas*. But the difference between the two is that Dayananda did not include

non-Hindus of India in his reformation scheme while Vivekananda tried to give a historical interpretation of the same, thereby syncretising the "Indo-Aryan religious experiences in their different stages and moods." This is his concept of "Dynamic Religion."(e)

Q. What did Swami Veivekananda say about Indian attitude towards tolerance and religion while addressing the World Parliament of Religion in Chicago in 1893?

A. While addressing the World Parliament of Religion in Chicago he had described India as "the most wonderful land of toleration" where "Indians build temples for Mohammedans and Christians." "We not only believe in universal acceptance but accept all religious as true", he further said.

Q. How does Sangh Parivar consider Swami Vivekananda and his writings?

A. The Sangh Parivar hails Vivekananda as a great nationalist for the wrong reasons. They have been projecting his role as a reactionary and a communal, not so much in terms of his own writings and speeches but because of the manner in which their "communal" parts are being hailed to serve chauvinism and communalism.(f)

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IV: SANGH PARIVAR AND INDIAN CULTURE

Q. What is culture? Has India many cultures?

A. Among many definitions, one of the most comprehensive remains Edward B Tylor's in 1871. According to it, culture is "that complex whole" which includes "knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as member of society." The noted anthropologist, Nirmal Kumar Bose, states it somewhat differently: "Culture is a term in anthropology which covers everything from the traditional manner in which people cook or eat their food; the way in which they plan their houses, and arrange them on the surface of the land, the manner in which they are arranged into communities; to the moral or religious values which are found acceptable; or the habitual methods by which satisfaction is gained in respect of the higher qualities of the mind."

According to these definitions, India will be seen to have many cultures with the factors of language, ethnicity and religion grouped in a bewildering variety of permutations and combinations. To cite a few examples, the culture of the Bengali Muslim is very different from that of the Punjabi Muslim as is that of the Keralite Nair from that of the Maharashtrian Chitpavan Brahmin. The latter will not have many things in common with a Yadav from Uttar Pradesh. Equally, the culture of a Muslim who has done a Ph.D from Cambridge and whose father was in the Indian Civil Service will be very different from that of a Muslim member of the Legislative Assembly in Bihar who has not studied beyond village high school. Can one then, prima facie, talk of a "One Culture" for India?[1(a)]

Q. Do Sangh Parivar and BJP take India's cultural diversity into account?

A. To be fair to the BJP, it does take India's cultural diversity into account. Its manifesto for the 1998 Lok Sabha elections says, "The unique cultural and social diversity in India is wo-

ven into a larger civilisational fabric by thousands of years of common living and common and shared values, beliefs and customs, struggles, joys and sorrows, as well as symbols of high degree of unity without uniformity. Our nationalist vision is bound by not merely the geographical or political identity of Bharat but it is referred by our timeless cultural heritable, which is central to all regions, religions and languages, is a civilisational identity and constitutes the cultural nationalism of India which is the core of Hindutva. This we believe, is the identity of our ancient nation 'Bharatvarsha'. To be fair to the BJP again, its manifesto describes diversity as "an inseparable part of India's past and present national tradition." It also states: "The well being of all, in short, the Indian mission. It is not limited to the residents of Bharat or the adherents of any particular race or creed. that is why Bharat received with open arms all faiths and people fleeing persecution whether it was Jews, Paris, Muslims, Christians and preserved and protected them long before any other civilisation could think short of exterminating those who differed from the ruling faiths and people."[(b)]

Q. Why do many people do not take such pronouncements of Sangh Parivar and BJP seriously?

A. Many people do not take such pronouncements seriously because these are inconsistent with the BJP's other pronouncements suggestive of a totalitarian approach to culture as well as some of its actions. The celebration of cultural diversity and religious tolerance is not compatible with the destruction of the Babri Mosque, attacks on Christians which, rightly or wrongly, are attributed to it; talk of making the singing of *Saraswati Vandana* and *Vande Mataram* compulsory in Government schools in Uttar Pradesh and of introducing the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* as compulsory subjects in school curricula.

It is difficult to explain such action in terms of Hinduism with its plural and humanist philosophy. The *Vedas* do not accept any dichotomy between *Purusha* (force) and *Prakriti* (field of force) which is the essence of *Samkhya* philosophy. the latter

rejects the idea of a personal God, the *Bhakti* cult is based on devotion to God as a person. The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* (including the *Bhagwat Gita*) believe in the incantation of Gods in human form; the idea is not present in the *Upanishads*. While the latter believe that the *Brahman* (universal consciousness) is present in every human being as the *Atman* (individual soul), the *Lokayata* (popular) school of philosophy does not believe in the existence of a soul independent of a body and capable of release or going to heaven on death. Numerous similar examples can be cited. Hinduism's plurality makes it quite compatible with the envisioning of a diverse world. In fact the latter can be seen as the manifestation of the all pervasive *Brahman* much in the same ways as the Hegelian world is the manifestation of the Spirit.[c]

Q. What is the national culture of India?

A. The national culture of India can never be Hindu culture and Hindu culture is not the Sangh Parivar culture. From ancient days Indian culture had been secular. Our first and most important books, the Vedas, gave no basis to the caste system which is posing a serious danger to our present-day society. It is false propaganda that Aryans were Hindus. In the Vedas we do not find the word 'Hindu'.

Hinduism as a religion never existed in Aryan society, and was recognised as a religion much later.[2]

Hindu Nationalism

Q. What is Hindu nationalism?

A. It is an assertion of the priority of Hindu identity. Hinduism as a defining element in identifying an Indian. But the interest of its votaries in Hinduism as a religion, traditionally understood, ends here. It would be wrong to assume that such identity is merely an expression of primordial attachment. In fact, religious nationalism is interested in creating a new social identity for a group through religious discourse and practice - it is the creation of a wholly new political identity using religious community as its base. Such an identity is a specific

product of changing norms of both religious discourse and organization. Religious nationalism builds on previous construction of religious community. Its discourse has two aspects, the cultural and the religious. In defining Hindu identity, Hindu nationalists do not base their argument either on Sanskritic Hinduism or popular Hinduism as manifested in its day-to-day practice of millions of people but on 'cultural Hinduism' which is a theoretical construct, or an abstraction underlying the new political movement.[3(a)]

Q. What is the nature of the cultural nationalism expressed in the term 'Hindutva'?

A. This cultural nationalism is expressed in the term "Hindutva", the core concept of Hindu nationalist doctrine, which is a modern political formulation, was invented by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883-1966) an atheist and revolutionary freedom fighter from Western India. The concept itself is comprehensive and totalising than Hinduism per se as it refers not merely to religious aspect of Hindu society but to cultural, linguistic, social and political aspects as well. The idea is to portray a collectivity of the Hindus as a homogeneous whole. Ashish Nandy, a noted social scientist, explains Hindutva as an attempt to create Hinduism as 'religion as ideology' as opposite to 'religion as faith' which in his opinion is more correct description of Hinduism because of its nonmonolithic character and operational plurality. Religion as ideology is used for political mobilisation of masses to convert them in a homogenized collectivity with an aim to create 'Hindu majority.[(b)]

Q. How is the new religio-cultural identities are created to mobilise the masses for political gains?

A. It is interesting to observe that how these new religio-cultural identities are created through ritual discourse and practice, changing forms of religious organisations, and communications. Hindu Society in the past few years is proliferated with several new rituals in which masses participate in large numbers. Shilanyas, Rathayatra, Kar Seva and Mahaartis may sound benign religious terms associated with Hindu rituals but that these rituals have explicit political overtones, that they

were employed to aggressively mobilise the masses and that they have an innate capacity to incite violence needs no elaboration. Hindu mode of worship or observation of rituals is largely individualistic but the new rituals mentioned above were meant essentially for public worship or observance. This publicisation of worship or observance of religious festivals has taken a curious turn in the past few years. In Bombay, public celebration of Ganesh festivals has a century old tradition. To that, in the recent years, is added the public worship of Durga, which is originally not a part of the tradition of the Bombay region. Last year or so, one more festival was 'invented' which followed immediately after Durga worship. It is the Saibaba festival. Though Saibaba - a Muslim saint appropriated by Hindus - has been venerated and worshipped in Hindu manner for a long time but public celebration of festival in a manner similar to Ganesh or Durga festival is a distinctly new phenomenon that has become visible only recently. In these newly created ritualistic practices, meanings are attached to symbols and interchange of symbols from religious and cultural arena acquires tremendous importance. OId but long forgotten meanings could be attached to the resurrected or newly created symbols or entirely new meaning could be invented for them. A mosque in Ayodhya (Babri Masjid) was transformed from a local shrine to a symbol of threatened Hindu majority.[c]

Q. What is the danger of projecting Hindutva as the cultural essence of Hindu society (cultural nationalism)?

A. Hindu nationalists project Hindutva as the cultural essence of Hindu society and therein lies the danger. In any process of nationalism, primordial cultural affinity undoubtedly plays an important role. But the ultimate goal of nationalist activity is the emergence of socio-political community with commonality of political purpose. This implies an interplay of forces that leads to the emergence (natural) and not creation (artificial) of such a community. Ideology of Hindu nationalism as observed earlier creates or constructs new identity and new collectivity mixing the religious and cultural discourse carefully and ultimately premising the whole argument more on culture and less on religion by using the tool of Hindutva. G. Aloysius's com-

ment on cultural nationalism (though he is not speaking of religious nationalism) is illuminating and leads us to the dangers of cultural nationalism. He says "The articulation of cultural nationalism revolves around first, the beliefs concerning the distinctness, integrity, uniqueness and superiority of one's culture and second, that such a culture is the proper and legitimate repository of collective and determinative power. The culture is named and identified, its contours delineated and lineage traced, its rise and fall in history noted and potential threats to be identified. Then this culture ... is presented as a normative model for the present and future nation."[d]

Q. Why did the framers of the Constitution pay special attention to the cultural rights of the minorities? Did they thereby stifle the expression of the cultural aspirations of the 'Hindu' majority?

A. When the BJP-RSS-VHP ideologues speak in withering tones about the appeasement of minorities and complain that the "Hindu majority" is being stifled in the expression of its cultural rights, they are presenting a blatantly distorted view of the political ethos as was originally conceived of by the framers of the Constitution. At this point in time, when provisions such as Articles 29 and 30 are under attack on the basis of shallow interpretations of their specific language, it is crucial to reconstruct the historical context in which these provisions were conceived. With remarkable prescience, the framers of the Constitution predicated the success of the new democratic state on its political capacity to carry along the different minorities. What stands out in a reading of the Constituent Assembly debates of December 1948, when the provisions on ensuring the secular character of the state and protecting minority rights were being discussed, is the near unanimity of views that the new state should be completely free of any religious orientation. There was also a virtual consensus in the Constituent Assembly that the various minorities would have to be offered Constitutional protection for the preservation of their cultures and languages.

Various speakers in the debate on December 8, 1948, discussing Articles 23 and 23A of the draft constitution (later Articles 29 and 30) dwelt at length on the necessity of addressing the needs of minorities in the light of the painful experience of other countries such as in Eastern Europe where the presence of repressive majorities had led o the "dissatisfaction of the minorities" rising to "a dangerous pitch." For instance, H.N. Kunzru pointed out that "comparative peace" was restored in Eastern Europe only when the League of Nations had intervened to "protect the language and culture of the minorities." Kunzru posed the rhetorical question to the Constituent Assembly: "Do we want in utter disregard to this history to pursue the dangerous path of fanatical nationalism as the majorities in Eastern Europe did?'

It is evident that the idea of protecting minority cultural and educational rights was born out of the conclusion that India's democracy would survive only if it was able to acknowledge and preserve the various cultures of its minority groups. It was also very clear to the framers of the Constitution that the state would have to be avowedly secular. Thus, one speaker, Renuka Roy from West Bengal, argued that "above all things, it is necessary that the instruction that is given to the citizens of the future shall be such that the idea of a secular state in which all citizens are equal comes into being... this can only be done if education which is the very basis on which we build our society is so imparted to the young that they do not learn to realise the distinctions which separate man and man but rather to learn that the underlying unity of humanity is more fundamental.

And another speaker, Ananthasayanam Ayyangar--"We are pledged to make the state a secular one. I do not, by the word secular, mean that we do not believe in any religion and that we have nothing to do with it in our day to day life. It only means that the state or the government cannot aid one religion or give preference to one religion against another."

The detailed account of the debates on these Articles that is available in the recorded proceedings of the Constituent As-

sembly does not leave any room for ambiguity as to what was intended in writing these provisions. The framers of the Constitution have specifically enshrined the political concept of a minority and also delineated the relationship of the secular state to such minority groups, by directing that the interests of these groups in preserving their language or culture be protected. The BJP has now suggested that these provisions be amended. One proposal is to amend the heading of Article 29 which now reads as "Protection of interests of minorities" with the bland formulation--"Protection of linguistic and cultural rights." The BJP also proposes to alter Article 30 which specifically states that "all minorities" whether based on religion or language have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice to the effect that this right would now be for "citizens." These suggestions have dangerous implications that must be understood.

It may be argued that in themselves, these amendments do not take away the rights of minorities but only broaden the scope of entitlement so as to apply to all citizens. But the real problem here is that in the effort to address a totally different issue of the relationship of private educational institutions and the state, the obligation to protect minority rights as envisaged by the Constitution is subsumed even as the political and Constitutional concept of minority groups is eroded. If indeed the BJP's education policy does not intend such an effect, why the focus on the specific provisions in the Constitution that were designed to address the issue of minorities and their place in the Indian nation-state?[4]

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V: SANGH PARIVAR AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY

Q. **The BJP Government, through its Ministry of Human Resource Development is making attempts to push the Hindutva agenda into school and college curricula. This agenda focus on the inclusion of the stories of certain aggressive Hindu heroes of different periods in the course contents. Is this approach justifiable? What is the nation needs at this stage?**

A. The ideology of caste sustains itself by delegitimising labour and the labour power. The removal of carcasses to protect the health of the villages, peeling of the skin converting it into leather, defending the villages from external threats, rearing of cattle and cultivation involve systematically designed labour processes. The Hindutva education system delegitimised the historical significance of all these labour processes.

Even the modern state system has not recognized the damage being done to our national psyche and development and remains indifferent to injecting the dignity of labour into our psyche. To develop an economy, it is necessary to create a psychological condition that a person who labours to produce should feel proud about his/her work and a parasite should feel that he/she is a burden on producers. Such a feeling must become part of the childhood formation. To achieve this goal, the course content of our primary education should change entirely. Perhaps, part of the malady lies in our higher education system. It never theorised the question of dignity of labour and its impact on national development.

The Hindutva notions of mythology-centred education certainly aid and abet this process of withdrawal of millions of youth from productive work because in no such mythological story narratives productive work finds a respectable place. The Hindutva forces must realise that the religion is not a substitute for economy. Our school and college students should know more about the history of the production of rice, wheat, meat and milk than the history of wars between different kings.[1]

Q. The Sangh Parivar under the stewardship of Mr. Murli Manohar Joshi has been in the vanguard of the effort to address the task of altering the national political and cultural ethos in favour of a majoritarian one. What are the means used to achieve this objective? What is to be done to preserve India's proud heritage as a multi-cultural civil society?

A. The first sign of this effort was the reconstitution of the Indian Council of Historical Research last June. This exercise involved the substitution of some of this country's finest historians by persons of much lower scholarly repute and in fact, in a repudiation of the fundamental requirement of historical research, by persons with a known bias in favour of a particular interpretation of historical events. The undue political interest in the composition of what was essentially an academic body signalled that the old game of appropriating history and the framing of issues to suit political ends was back in place. It must be remembered that it was such a partisan appropriation of historical facts that led to the VHP's highly abrasive campaign against the Babri Masjid and its ultimate demolition.

What should not be missed in sorting out the implications of this recent controversy over the BJP's sponsorship of the Hindutva-tinged education proposals is the explicit rejection of India's multicultural heritage. Completely absent from the suggestions contained in the annexure to the BJP Government's education policy paper is the influence of any cultural tradition other than Hindu. Thus it is recommended that Sanskrit which has made "a unique contribution to the cultural unity of the nation" be made a compulsory subject. What of the other languages and cultures that have made India the fascinating and richly-hued blend that it is of several traditions? Interestingly, the "unique" role claimed for Sanskrit in fostering cultural unity would be contested sharply not only in the context of the Indian historical experience but also in terms of deeply divided caste perceptions which would reject Sanskrit because of its perceived association with Brahmanical hegemony. Thus the monochrome picture of Indian culture presented in these pro-

posals would probably be sharply at odds with the experiences of different social groups who can rightfully claim an equal inheritance in India's cultural legacy.

What is really at stake here is less so the political issue of secularism than the issue of preserving India's multicultural inheritance and its pluralist political ethos. Proponents of the Hindutva project have skillfully reduced the struggle to preserve the pluralist character of Indian civil society to a banal conflict between secular and communal, Muslim and Hindu. This deeply coloured and reductionist view of the entire debate hingeing on the attempt to change the political ethos of Indian civil society does injustice to the context of India's success as a secular and vibrant democracy. If today, India's experiment as a democratic nation-state has elicited the reluctant admiration of the world's doom-sayers, it is in large part due to the enlightened and far-sighted political vision of those who drafted India's Constitution in the late Forties.[2]

Q. How does Sangh Parivar want to use educational institutions and text books and history to achieve its goal?

A. The BJP has introduced sweeping purges in all Centrally funded research institutes: Indian Council of Historical Research, Indian Council of social Science Research, Indian council of Philosophical Research and Indian Institute of Advanced Studies. Breaking most institutional norms and rules, these bodies have been cleansed of subject experts and renowned scholars, and packed with men distinguished by RSS sympathies.

change in personal goes hand in hand with a methodical doctoring of facts in school textbooks designed for the BJP States. They pour unverified charges against Muslim rulers, stridently catalogue alleged wrongs perpetrated on Hindu kings and gods, abuse the BJP's adversaries like Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav by name and insert RSS heroes as great freedom fighters.

What are these changes in aid of? The RSS professes the notion of Hindu Rashtra--that India belongs to Hindu alone. That notion depends upon a relentless hatred against all those

who think otherwise. It has led to many bloody pogroms against Muslims and, more recently, to gross violence against and abuse of Christians. Universally-respected secular educationists have faced intimidation and threats for opposing the RSS politics or policies.

Apart from coercion, formidable hegemonic devices have been perfected over the last 73 years, precisely to teach these values. The RSS shakhas started functioning in 1925. Every day, they have 'boudhik' sessions that train members in imagined "histories" of outrage against Hindus. A documentary on shakhas for infants depicts a favorite game that enacts the "reconquest" of Kashmir through battles. We were proudly told by the headmaster of an RSS-run school in Delhi that he held forth on the Babri mosque saga at the assembly everyday; five-year-olds would clench their fists in fury and swear vengeance under the influence of his oratory. Night schools and *sanskar kendras* take these messages beyond regular schooltime. The RSS itself is acknowledged to be the classroom for all its affiliates and sub-affiliates: BJP, VHP, Bajrang Dal and handpicked cadres, trained in daily shakhas over years, come to these fronts to teach RSS values and intentions. Pedagogy is an essential tool for the Sangh Parivar.

A lot of our intellectuals dismiss the massive interventionism of the Sangh in education as a mere diversion from real issues and problems had have resulted from the all-too-obvious failures of BJP governance. This is perfectly true, but it overlooks the real strength of their educational plan. For issues and problems will become operationally "real" only when they are widely recognized to be vital concerns, while non-issues also need to be interpreted as secondary or marginal. And that does not happen instinctively, automatically, but only through education. For decades now, the RSS has been imparting an education that confuses perceptions of the real and the contrived. It has taught that patriotism is vengeance, that the nation is Hindu, that struggles for human rights and equality and social justice are alien to our culture, they are divisive and they are the fruits of Macaulay's poison tree. In the BJP-run States,

school textbooks have sections glorifying the Pokhran tests. The RSS has insisted that we only look for knowledge that is home-grown, however, offensive or exploitative that might be to Dalits, to women, to democracy.

As important as what it teaches is what it silences and renders non-issue. It suppresses knowledge about what lies behind Indian poverty, it displaces discussions on what is welfare and social justice and how to attain them. The new educational suggestions and policy guidelines are essential to achieve a confusion of priorities on a nationwide scale.

A regimentation of knowledge and a suppression of critical enquiry have proceeded for a long time through specifically RSS agencies. This will continue unabated even if their drastic misgovernance temporarily robs the BJP of state power.[3]

Q. What is the Hindutva doctrine by which young boys are trained by Sangh Parivar?

A. This is a Hindu nation, and Muslim and Christians have been the foreign aggressors. The western concepts of democracy and secularism have been imposed on the Hindu society by the pro-West intellectuals like Nehru etc. Hindu society requires to organise around the Sangh Parivar to restore its past glory and show the aliens and alien ideas there place.[4]

Q. What is the method used by Sangh Parivar to form the world views of children according to the philosophy of Hindutva?

A. Control of the minds of youth is essential to form new world-views. So the Sangh Parivar insists on capturing schools and curricula through which young mind can be shaped with distorted versions of history.

Through a subversion of all wings of the state and many aspects of civil society, the Sangh Parivar have shown that they can misrepresent facts through outpourings of hatred and venom, selectively act and ... get away with it.

Q. What was the objective of introducing the symbol of goddess Saraswati in the education system by Human Resource Development Minister, Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi and why this move has opposed by Indians themselves?

A. According to the Hindutva forces Saraswati, Laxmi and Rama represent cultural ethos of the nation and opposing these symbols amounts to opposing the nation itself. This argument emanates from the Hindutva agenda that the education system right from the school stage should inculcate a respect for these symbols in all children irrespective of caste, class, religion and gender. Since the days of the freedom struggle these forces have been projecting the Hindutva symbols as the only symbols of the Indian civil society. After the BJP came to power in different states and at the Centre, they began to push these cultural symbols into all kinds of state institutions.

Such a process will pose a major threat to the productive ethos and to the symbols of civilisation that got constructed in the process of human evolution.

Q. What should be the nature of symbols that must be adopted in a secular state like India?

A. Every nation produces two modes of essentials of life. One takes its living process in civilisation and the other in culture. Culture is a by-product of the civilisational systems. The Indian pot, plough, sickle, hammer, wheel, shoe and so on represent the Indian civilisation whereas the images of the gods and goddesses represent one aspect of the Indian culture. But even in the pre-Islamic and pre-colonial India, no single image of god or goddess represented the culture of all Indians.

Leave alone the well-known oppositional cultural symbols of Buddhism and Hinduism; the cultural images of Pochamma (a popular goddess of the Dalit-Bahujan masses in the Telugu country) and of Saraswati represent two different cultures and the interests of two different section. On the contrary, the civilisational symbols such as pot, plough, wheel, sickle and hammer represent the interests of all sections irrespective of caste, race, religion, language and gender. The pot was/is as

useful an instrument of civilisation to Hindus, as it is to Muslims. Christians and other religious people. It is as useful to the Brahmins as it is to the Dalits and the Advises.

Attempts to invoke the symbols of civilisation are not uncommon. The best example is that of Ashoka. After the Kalinga war, he became a Buddhist and established the first Indian welfare state. He adopted the wheel (Ashoka chakra) as the symbol of his ancient welfare state. This symbol of civilisation emerges from the fact that his welfare state needed to produce more grain and pulses to fulfill the needs of the masses. To facilitate the movement of the agrarian products, Ashoka brought about a revolution in the transport system. To achieve that historical purpose and to enthuse the peasantry and the artisan classes, he adopted the chakra as his state symbol. The Hindutva forces, however, hardly have any respect for that symbol of civilisation.

Civilisation and culture are only two aspects of history and history is a combination of several other aspects also. The students should know about history in its totality. To provide such a space for the producers of symbols of civilisation a change in the consciousness of the textbook writers, the policy-makers and the teachers is essential. The consciousness of these forces is structured on their caste/class interests. Conditioning the consciousness of civil society around the religious, mythical cultural symbols served the interests of these forces; hence, they constructed the story narratives that had thrown up such cultural symbols. At this stage, the entry of civilisational symbols into our educational texts serves a secular progressive purpose

The Indian symbols of civilisation provide a far more legitimate alternative because they originate in the living and production process of the masses. By learning about them, the young minds will acquire a scientific temper.[5]

Q. Does the exclusion of religious instruction or ritual from state schools constitute an offence against Hinduism?

A. To believe so is to believe that Hinduism cannot survive unless the state props it up. And, if it is an offence against Saraswati that a hymn to Her does not inaugurate a state function, do we not, by the same logic, insult every other faith, and the philosophy of unbelief, by not including them in state-sponsored events?[6]

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VI: SANGH PARIVAR VERSUS MINORITIES

Q. What is the hate campaign initiated by the Sangh Parivar in the recent past against Christians?

A. As per this campaign Christianity is a 'foreign' religion, Christian missionaries are here mainly for converting the poor and gullible, their social service activities are a mere ploy for the conversions, these conversions are done by inducement or force, and fraudulent means are adopted for the same. These conversions are anti-national acts as Christianity is a foreign religion. The insurgency in the North East is because of the propaganda of the missionaries. There is a plot to Evangelise this Hindu Nation. Because of conversion Christians will become more in number and this country will become the Christian country as we Hindus will be reduced to a minority.[1]

Q. What is the hidden agenda of Sangh Parivar and the disinformation spread by it against Christian missionaries? What is the challenge proposed to build a United India?

A. President Kennedy's famous words are "Ask not what the country should do for you but what you should do for the country." The Christian community is doing just this for decades. However, the Sangh Parivar persists with their disinformation, viz

1) **Christianity is an alien religion**: (a) Founder, Jesus Christ, is a Jew born in the Middle East Asia. Christianity started in India 1947 years ago i.e in 52 AD when apostle St.Thomas arrived in India; (b) Over 98% of the missionaries are Indians. Here is a sprinkling of foreign missionaries who are over 60 years and have Indian citizenship.

2) **Forced Conversions**: Official statistics of the Christian population has come down from 2.8 Crores to 2.4 crores during the last decade. Conversions if they do take place, are because of the exemplary example of love and service shown by the Christian missionaries.

3) **Missionaries purchase conversions**: All foreign donations are regulated and audited by government authorities. There is no exorbitant easy money flow as is being exaggerated.

The Christian missionaries in the rural areas are not only involved with education and health care of the tribals and the poor villagers but are also giving them expertise to improve upon their small agricultural yields and to manage their meagre finances, fertilizers, seeds, etc. through co-operation amongst the villagers themselves. The motto is to help them to help themselves.

Above all, is the acceptance that they are equal to all their fellowmen.

With these changes taking place, how then will the high caste landlords and money leaders get their bonded labour and cheap labour to exploit for their activities?

This, therefore, is the hidden agenda of the Sangh Parivar viz. aggressively drive out the missionaries and retain the caste system.

I challenge the RSS, VHP, Bajrang Dal and BJP to join the Christian community to take up the gigantic task with missionary zeal, to uplift the over 60% living under the poverty line by introducing in rural India educational institutions, health centres, homes for the lepers, destitutes, orphans, physically handicapped, mentally retarded, etc.etc.

Stop atrocities and take up the challenge to build a United India of Mahatma Gandhi's dreams.[2]

Q. Why is the Sang Parivar upset about the conversions started the hate campaign against Islam & Christianity?

A. Islam and Christianity are not religions of Indian origin. Yet over 15% of the Indians are today Muslims and 2.5% are Christians. But these Muslims have not come from Arabia or Rome. They are Indians. Rarely, the upper castes Hindus took to these religions. It is the oppressed indigenous people, who embraced these two egalitarian religions.

Sangh Parivar's allegation is that Christians and Muslims are converting Hindus as they are poor and financial inducement lured them into conversion. The Meenakshipuram and Dangs incidents show that poverty is not the cause of conversions. These converts to Islam and Christianity have not become rich even today. But conversion brought them liberation which in turn assured them social justice. It is also true that Dalits, Tribals and Backward castes have became poor because they were exploited by the Hindu upper castes. These people were denied socio-economic and political justice. Those who went over to egalitarian religion and regained their human rights and human dignity.

Hindu religion does not believe in collective salvation but only in "individual salvation." Collective uplift has never been a Hindu trait. Anybody who tried to uplift a whole mass of people immediately comes under the hate cloud of the Sangh Parivar and finished.

If the free, compulsory and universal primary education assured in the Constitution is denied to the people, it is because education will liberate them. Since education helped the upper castes to become rulers, they will never allow the indigenous slaves to seek education. Education brings awareness. Know the Truth and the Truth shall make you free. The Christian missionaries are doing this job of education which the Hindus don't do. No Hindu religious institution runs any educational institution except for their own *jatwalas*. Only Christians do this job. Hence they are hated and attacked.

Upper cast Hindus were interested in the education of the lower caste. Neither they allow others to educate them. Because they know that if they are educated they will revolt against those who oppressed them and they will not be able to use them a slaves for their menial work. Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Sikhism have become egalitarian religions though which the oppressed could liberate themselves. Hence conversion was found to be the only accepted path for them to escape the suffocation experienced by them for centuries.[3]

Q. What was the motive behind raising of the issue of religious conversion by Sangh Parivar?

A. By alleging that the conversions were forceful, the VHP and the Bajrang Dal have succeeded in whipping up passions of local Hindu communities. It is disturbing to note that the BJP has not denounced the violence against Christians categorically. Their main thrust is to force the Sangh Parivar culture on Christians and stop them from propagating Christianity. Their old animosity towards Muslims was known. Now Christians are the Sangh Parivar's soft targets. Actually, it is not Muslims, Buddhists and Christians who are abhorrent to them but the propagation of Islam, Buddhism and Christianity on Indian soil. The teachings of these religions go against their interest. If Muslims and Christians adopt Hindutva culture, Hindu communalists will have no problems with them.

By perpetuating religious conflicts, the Sangh Parivar is bent on putting a check on the propagation and progress of other religions in secular India.[4]

Q. What is the clue to the real hidden agenda of Sangh parivar and cause of hatred against Christian missionaries?

A. The Sangh parivar's tirade against Prof. Amartya Sen for his call to prioritise literacy is a clue to their real agenda. To Mr. Ashok Singhal, the Nobel laureate is in collusion with Christian missionaries in advocating the eradication of illiteracy from India. With that, the Hindutva cat has leapt quite out of its nationalistic bag. Mr. Singhal's anxiety amounts to an open confession that the Christian commitment to literacy, rather than their converting people to Christianity, is the real nightmare for the Parivar. It is not an accident that universal literacy for children under 14 years of age has not been a priority with any of the governments so far. Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee too, like his predecessors, gives the excuse of not having enough funds, though that did not hinder the weaponising of our nuclear programme. So the government will not run schools for the poor. But if Christians do what the Government cannot, they will be targeted and terrorised. It is obvious that demoralising

Christian missionaries who educate and empower the Dalits and tribals will continue even if Christians were to renounce their constitutional right to propagate their faith.[5]

Q. What has empowered the Sangh Parivar to launch their destructive crusades against minorities in Gujarat and Orissa?

A. Without the enshrining of the majoritarian political ethos that brought the BJP to power in Delhi, the goon squads of the Bajrang Dal and other such offshoots of the Sangh Parivar would not have felt empowered and emboldened to launch their destructive and bloodthirsty "crusades" and horrifying atrocities in Gujarat and Orissa.[6]

Q. What was the purpose of Sangh Parivar in intensifying campaign against Christians and organising re-conversion ceremonies?

A. Intensifying campaigns against Christians and sudden rash of conversion ceremonies is seen as a part of a larger Hinduisation programme. It is difficult to see what the Sangh Parivar hopes to achieve by all this. Apart from conferring poor people and wasting their time there does not seem to be any immediate gain. More solid support from the Hindu vote banks for Bharatiya Janata Party. Perhaps the Sangh Parivar believes that history of caste discrimination and marginalisation of tribal people will be wiped out with this kind of impressive show of walk over fire and 'ghar vapas' ceremonies. Also, that such show would wipe out the need for active work in programmes for the development of the underprivileged.[7]

Q. What is the effect of mass religious reconversions organized by the Sangh Parivar?

A. Mass religious re-conversions are not only the sign of a serious misplacement of priorities but also a dangerous step towards the intensification of communal tension.

Q. Which are the sources of hate-energy used by Sangh Parivar to sustain the momentum of Hindutva?

A. The Muslims and the Christians. The Muslims, the alleged destroyers of Hindus temples, were a threat only in the past. But Christians are the real bomb ticking away at the base of the Hindu society. They are part of an international conspiracy. Their missionaries are out to convert Hindus en masse and wipe out Hinduism from the land of its birth. Their schools and colleges are traps laid for Hindus; religious dressing rooms where their Hindu garbs are exchanged for Christian costumes. And so the canard makes its round.

The think-tank of Hindutva has a point here. Christianity is, in the ultimate analysis, a greater stumbling block for the Hindutva project than Islam could ever be. If Islam is the crutch on which Hindutva hobbled to political visibility. Christianity is the clogs on its faltering steps. This becomes obvious against the backdrop of Hindutva's reactionary agenda as an outfit of high caste militancy.

One has to be particularly naive to believe that the Christian community's penchant for converting tribals is the main nightmare for the Sangh Parivar. It is worse than a joke to suggest that the survival of an 800-million strong Hindu community is threatened by a few conversions here and there. The real threat that the Parivar sees vis-a-vis the Christians is their commitment to people's empowerment: Their preferential option for the poor and the dalits, their missionary involvement in education, and their affirmation of the worth and dignity of the lowliest and the least.

Such a "mission" unleashes potent forces in a stagnant social sphere. This can only seem a subversive agenda from the perspective of caste domination and the eagerness to protect the status quo. The traditional world view and socio-religious order, stamped with the hegemony and vested interests of the upper castes, has a rare genius for resenting and resisting change, especially any change that threatens the domination of the upper castes. The foremost "mission" of Hindutva is to contain this threat, and to stifle the impending subaltern ferment inspired at first by the Christian presence in the Indian

context, and reinforced of late by political processes especially since 1993.[8]

Q. Is Parishad leaders accusation that Christian missionaries tempt Hindus to conversion is justifiable?

A. As for the constant refrain of VHP leaders about Christian missionaries tempting Hindus to conversion, the Parishad's leaders might usefully ponder on why certain classes of Hindus are so easily tempted to leave the Hindu fold. If these leaders do manage to think upon this honestly and independently they might realise that those who leave Hinduism for Christianity do so usually to escape humiliation, indignity, illiteracy and all kinds of insecurity.[9]

Q. How genuine are the Sangh Parivar's fears of India being a Christianised or Islamised in a systematic way?

A. India was under Islamic rule for six centuries. Did it become an Islamic nation? No, it remained predominantly Hindu. Again, it was ruled by the British for two centuries. did it become Christian? Their fears of India becoming a Christian or Islamic state are without a basic or firm foundation.[10]

Q. How do the cultural nationalist misinterpret a language or a colour in its favour? How do they establish the "otherness" of Muslims and other minorities through derogatory remarks?

A. Even a language or a colour does not escape from rigid cultural nationalistic interpretation. Hindi is a language of Hindus while Urdu is Muslim. Their relation to the sacred languages of Hinduism and Islam that is Sanskrit and Arabic respectively is emphasised. Saffron is the colour of Hindus while Green is a Muslim colour. Derogatory references to Muslims with reference to the Green colour and the practice of circumcision, in the print media or public rallies of extremist Hindu organisations, is not uncommon. These derogatory references establish the 'otherness' of Muslims vis-a-vis Hindus, and results in stereotyping of Muslims as if they constitute a homogeneous group. Creation of a negative image of the target

community is essential part of the programme of religion-inspired nationalism. Hence many a Hindu nationalist constantly expresses doubts about a Muslim's loyalty to India. A Hindu is naturally patriotic but a Muslim is seldom so, Muslims are fanatic or bigoted while Hindus are tolerant. A communication pattern adopted by Hindu nationalism also emphasises 'foreignness' of Muslims. Islam came from 'outside', hence Muslims are 'foreigners'. Although some Hindu nationalist leaders hasten to add that a 'nationalist, patriotic' Muslim is not to be treated as a foreigner or an outsider, but for the mass psyche, the damage is already done.[11(a)]

Q. Is Hindu nationalism anti-Muslim and anti-modern and anti-western?

A. Hindu nationalism is not only anti-Muslim but is also 'anti-western' and 'anti-modern'. This anti-westernism is reflected in the glorification of Indian (read Hindu) culture and values and in the persistent argument about the onslaught of western culture on the cherished Indian values.[(b)]

Q. What is the most important apprehension expressed about Hindu nationalism related to the minority rights?

A. The most important apprehension expressed about Hindu nationalism has been the protection of minority rights. The BJP claims that communal tension in India would be eased if the communal identities are appreciated. Muslims could be integrated into society more easily as Muslims rather than the faceless individuals created by secular nationalism. L.K. Advani, the BJP leader is confident, that Muslims would be happy if the BJP came to power. This argument smacks of the sinister doctrine of separate but equal leading to ghettoisation of Muslims. Jurgensmeyer is sure that "even in the best circumstances, however, they will be made to feel like minorities."[12]

Q. Is the hate campaign against minorities a part of Sangh parivar's long term ideological as well as political strategy?

A. The hate campaign against minorities has been a part of Sangh Parivar's long-term ideological as well as political strategy.

Remember the position taken on by the various organs of the Sangh parivar during the Ram mandir/Babri Masjid campaign. Are not the position taken by the Parivar vis-a-vis the Christians in 1998-99 similar to those adopted during 1992-93?

These attacks are a part of a coherent and continuous ideological tradition. The Sangh Parivar's cultural nationalism is based on this ideological tradition. And the Parivar takes Guru Golwalkar's Hindutva ideology as its starting point where violence is only latent.

Just read what Golwalkar said: "To keep up the purity of the nation and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of semitic races--the Jews ... a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by."

What lesson? Golwalkar clarified: "They (the Muslims and the Christians) are born in this land, no doubt. But are they true to its salt? ... No. Together with the change in their faith, gone is the spirit of love and devotion for the nation."

Golwalkar provided solutions to the problems: "They (the Muslims and the Christians) may stay in the country wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment, not even citizen's right."

Since Golwalkar wanted his followers to take lessons from Nazi Germany, the patterns of the hate-campaign against the minorities adopted by the Sangh Parivar are similar to those adopted by the Nazis against the Jews. No particular Jews since the allegations against them always changed in rapid succession. Which is why, the list of crimes with which the Jews were charged is a long one.

First, the charge of poisoning wells was levelled against them. Then books and pamphlets were freely distributed in which Jews were shown as a dangerous race since they did not hesitate to murder children for ritual purposes.

Jews were held responsible for polluting the national culture by penetrating the national life. They were dubbed as stub-

bornly inflexible people who never joined the national mainstreams.

The obvious Nazi motive behind spreading all these canard against the Jews was to create psychological pressure to justify their killing. The extremist communal and fascist political positions of the Nazis appealed basically to people's irrational impulses and fears.

Such deep passion was bound to be ineradicable and, therefore, also bound to assume a new form--a vicarious one. If one goes through the brazen inflammatory propaganda against the Indian minorities, one will find these minorities to be as devalued a group as the Jews in the Nazi Germany.

Imperialist views have been carefully propagated all these years that the medieval period of Indian history represented "Muslim tyranny", depicting the history of medieval Indian society as one long tale of murder, rapine, oppression, hostility to Hinduism and Hindus and forcible spread of Islam through the destruction of temples and forcible conversions by the "Muslim rulers."

Every effort was made to make even the educated well-to-do Hindus honestly feel that Muslims have been pampered, appeased and spoilt for the past 45 years by a "benevolent Congress government", at the Hindus' cost.

Now the focus has shifted from the Muslim to the Christians for political exigency. The Christian missionaries are being accused of destabilising communal harmony by converting Hindus forcibly.

Realising the political potential of the anti-Christian campaign in the wake of emergence of Sonia Gandhi (because of her Christian background), posing strong political challenge to the BJP, the Sangh Parivar has made Christians their target one year go.

However, the question is not of any individual. The question is of extremist communal and fascist positions taken by the poli-

ticians of the Parivar which helps in evolving strong negative images of a particular group. Violence against this particular group is the natural outcome in such a situation.

This is being done by the Sangh Parivar in absolute opposition to the ideal of composite nationalism as enshrined in the Constitution of secular India.[13]

Q. What make the minorities apprehensive of Sangh Parivar and BJP's concept of Hindutva inspite of the fact that they preach a highly broad plural and humanist philosophy of religion and Indian culture?

A. The trouble arises from the attempt to use the concept of Hindutva for political mobilisation which reduces a highly complex philosophy to strident slogans which acquire aggressive overtones. This is because mobilisation for something is also mobilisation against something else; championship of *Hindutva*, for examples, involves opposition to what is described as "minority appeasement" or "pseudo secularism." This as well as the aggressive conduct fostered by aggressive rhetoric makes the minorities apprehensive.[14]

Q. What is the effect the "hate campaign" initiatived by the Hindutva forces on the nation?

A. It goes without saying that hate is a negative and crippling emotion. It infects individuals and nations with negativity, the hallmarks of which are excessive enthusiasm for murder and mayhem on the one hand, and total paralysis vis-a-vis what is constructive and altruistic, on the other. Every society that countenances injustice endangers its social dynamism. The systemic atrocities that vast sections of our society have suffered over millennia, their socio-cultural castration, has been an important reason for our impotence as a nation over the centuries. This has cost us dear in the past. Today it snarls at the destiny of this nation through the teeth of Hindutva. It threatens to dissipate and disable our national dynamism, even as the Prime Minister calls for a "new work culture" in order to build a dynamic nation that can hold its own in the face of the emerging and demanding global order.[15]

Q. What will be the long-term impact of the anti-Christian crusade by VHP in India?

A. For the present, however, India's secular image has been badly tarnished. Looking into the future, the next round of the cold war will be between the Islamic world and the Christian west. In such a scenario, a secular India would have been well placed to play a neutral role. But we have already antagonised the Islamic world because of the Babri masjid demolition. And now, we are antagonising the West also. India is getting increasingly isolated in the world arena.[16]

Q. What was the appeal made by Dr. George M. Anathil, SVD, the Bishop of Indore to the Hindu community in the context of atrocities committed against Christians in India by the Sangh Parivar?

A. "The increasing attacks on Christians and Christian institutions, especially in Gujarat is alarming and has created a sense of insecurity among the minority communities. Earlier the target of these fanatic organizations was the Muslims. But since the Muslims retaliate in the same manner, they have now turned their ire on the Christians who are peace loving people and therefore do not retaliate violently. But our peace lovingness should not be taken as weakness. Like Mahatma Gandhi who overthrow the colonialism and suppression of the British by a non-violent agitation, we too will be forced to start a movement of peaceful and non-violent agitation all over the country. If these attacks on our personnel and institutions continue unabated. The so-called defenders of Hinduism are actually tarnishing the image of Hinduism which is a religion of tolerance. Hinduism co-existed for centuries with other religions and assimilated what is good in other religions. It is heartening that the vast majority of Hindus do not subscribe to the fanatic attitude of the RSS, Bajarangdal and VHP.

These fanatic organisations justify their attacks on the Christians with the false accusations that the Christian missionaries are converting the Hindus, that they are anti-national, they are foreign agents etc. Millions of Hindus and people of other

religions have gone through our educational institutions and have benefited from our health services and developmental works. How many have been converted? If even one percent of the people whom we serve were converted, today the number of Christians would have considerably increased. But the fact is that the percentage of Christians has decreased in the last decade. According to the 1981 census the percentage of Christians was 2.6% whereas at present it has decreased to 2.3%. So where are the mass conversions about which the RSS, VHP and Bajarangdal are afraid and agitated?

They accuse us of being anti-national and agents of foreign powers to disintegrate the country. Christians are no less patriotic and nationalistic than the rest of the Indians. The Christian community has contributed for the national integration and development much more than any other community through their educational institutions, health services and socio-economic programmes. It is in fact, these fanatic organisations who are creating disunity and discord among the different communities with their attacks and propaganda against the minority communities. If these tendencies and activities of theirs are not checked in time, it will lead to the disintegration of the country. The hidden reason behind the opposition to our humanitarian works for the uplift of the outcast and downtrodden section of the society is that they do not want these people to come up in life and assert their rights because then they will lose their hold on them and will not be able to exploit them.

I appeal to the vast majority of our Hindu brothers and sisters who are very tolerant and peace loving not to fall a prey to the hidden agenda of these few fanatic organisations who are spoiling the name of Hinduism and destroying the communal peace and harmony in our country. In Mother India's lap there is place for every caste, creed and culture. As children of our great Mother India, let us foster the rich heritage of our country and promote communal peace and harmony based on mutual trust and respect".[17]

Q. How do genuine Hindus feel about the violent and dastardly deeds of Sangh Parivar in the recent past and their effects on Hindutva?

A. "How will I explain to my daughter that Hinduism is a tolerant, non-violent religion with any conviction? I am ashamed to be a Hindu today. Other religions sometimes committed these dastardly deeds. Not Hinduism. Hindus are genuine, I believed. We are gentle.

I have felt ashamed of being a Hindu for some years now. The rise of this fundamentalist, clownish, rath yatra toting saffron band has been an uncomfortable event for me. We Hindus have never needed to wave the flag of our faith or shout our mantras from the rooftops, advertise our faith, or seek conversions, or quarrel over numbers, or call for crusades or holy wars, or bomb embassies.

Hinduism was a good philosophy of life. You knew your mantras. You practised the few rituals you felt were important, quietly and soberly. And above all, you concentrated on being a good, decent human being deserving moksha. There was no fanaticism. No instance zeal.

And then the Bajrang Dals, Hindu Parishads, Bhajapas and Nazi Senas came into being. Came into being to spoil, forever, the name of Hinduism. I almost feel that perhaps they are CIA or Mossad sponsored. A wonderful master game plan to irreparably damage the Hindu faith.

They have defiled Hinduism. Brought Hinduism an Auschwitz kind of shame. And to think that there are hundreds among us who have welcomed them in our midst.

I feel ashamed. And never more so than today. A band of people, practising some bizarre version of Hinduism, have brought shame to an ancient faith, one of the oldest faiths in the world. One of the more perfect faiths in the word. never before, I believe in 10,000 years of history have Hindus been responsible for such dastardly deeds.[18]

Q. What was the appeal made to the leaders of the Hindu community by speakers of various faiths at the time of atrocities committed against Christian minorities in Gujarat and Orissa?

A. "We urge the leaders of the Hindu community to come out in vehement condemnation of atrocities perpetrated in the name of this great faith. We appeal to the people of India to denounce and discourage the communalisation of our culture ad public life. We pray that as a people we would uphold justice, compassion and truth and build together a nation of righteousness."[19]

Q. What was the opinion expressed by Swami Renganathanada, the President of Ramakrishna Mission and Ashram about the nation-wide conflict kicked up by the Sangh Parivar on the question of religious belief, practice and propagation especially by Christians?

A. Communalism and religious conflicts, according to the Swamiji came to India from abroad. Religious animosity never germinated in the past, nor will it ever sprout in India. The reason behind the hatred we see today is not religion but politics. The conflict, if any, is between believers who think communally. There is absolutely no problem among Hindus. Christians and Mulisms whose thinking is spiritual and not communal. Religions which have grown and become a big force in this country are all spiritual religions. Communal religions are not the product of India. All religions, except those which wanted to promote itself through political patronage, have always prospered in this country. Vivekananda had said in Chicago that India was the home of all religions. That is our basic tenant. All religions are different paths to one God.[20]

Q. What is the criticism made by Jagatguru shankaracharya of Puri on the Sangh Parivar for misleading people in the name of religion and trying to stifle the voice of the genuine Hindu saints?

A. He said at a press conference in new Delhi, "The so-called self-made saviour of Hinduism had tried to pressurise these

genuine saints to toe their line. But the genuine saints had so far and would in future also resist all such attempts."[21]

Q. Who are the victims of Hindutva aggression?

A. In an obvious sense, one minority community after another will be the immediate victim of Hindutva's survival-diet of aggression. But there are, besides, a hidden and a collateral victim who are at least as relevant to this scenario as the minorities are. The hidden victim is the subaltern India; millions trapped in caste oppression, and excluded from the fruits of development. Stifling their likely resurgence, and perpetuating their social, economic and cultural entombment, are a greater priority for the Parivar than crippling a few Christian missionaries or destroying a handful of Muslim mosques. The collateral victim is the country: Its culture, its character and its very destiny. And that is the ultimate irony of Hindutva, as it has been with every project of hate-based cultural nationalism: It paralyses the nation it professes to idolise.[22]

Q. What was done by the Sangh Parivar to create a monolithic militant Hindu majority? How did the minorities react to the concept of Indianisation formulated by Bharatiya Jana Sangh in 1960s?

A. To create a monolithic militant Hindu majority a Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) was found in 1925. It initiated this ideology and equated national culture with Hindu culture. The Bharatiya Jana Sangh in 1960s based its controversial programme of 'Indianization' on this very idea and demanded the subordination of all narrow loyalties like religion, caste, language or dogma to the overriding loyalty to the 'Nation.' The non-Hindus in India, especially the Muslims, were quick to perceive implications of 'Indianisation' and the Jan Sangh's then leading ideologue Balraj Madhok was equally quick to dispel the fears of the minorities by explaining that it aimed at making every citizen of India a better Indian, a good patriot and a nationalist. But elsewhere, he made himself clearly unambiguous when he stated "It is the Hinduness of a man that makes him a national of India". [23]

Q. What is the truth and logic behind the proposal of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad that a combined front of four faiths be formed in South and South-East Asia to fight the incursions of Islam and Christianity?

A. The proposal of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad that a combined front of four faiths be formed in south and south-east Asia to fight the incursions of Islam and Christianity suggests a frightening illiteracy regarding the history of religions. It also represents an absolute unconsciousness about ground realities. There is this blithe belief among the members of the VHP, and presumably among the members of other outfits of the sangh parivar as well, that Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs will only be too happy to join the proposed front in order to fight "outsiders". They seem to have no inkling of the fact that the three faiths were born at different times to fill up what was seen to be lacking in Hinduism, and caste oppression and other forms of injustice in the Hindu faith caused many Hindus to become Buddhists and Jains. It is a measure of the VHP's absurdity that it should be thinking of fighting conversion by bringing together another army of converts from Hinduism. The proposal also makes an assumption, not particularly respectful to the "brother" faiths, that they are part of some larger family of Hinduism.

It is pointless to ask the enthusiastic members of the VHP why they think that vast regions of Asia would welcome their fanatical battles. The only sane, though not noble, reason that can be attributed to their plan of a united front of faiths is the recent and serial exposure of their hollowness. The VHP, together with the Bajrang Dal and certain other ultra-Hindu outfits have drawn upon themselves the censure and anger of people within the country and outside because of their attacks on minorities. By putting up a show of conviction, backed by non-existent statistics of the number of converts, they probably hope to invest their actions with legitimacy. Perhaps they still hope to pick a few quarrels where none exist in order to stay in the limelight.[24]

Q. What is the objective of Sangh Parivar's attempt to align with Buddhists, Sikhs, Jains for a religious alliance? (Ref. Ahmedabad dharam Sansad on February 7, 1999, Telegraph)

A. Its purpose is to cultivate the bigger Hindu votebank. It is obvious the Sangh Parivar's "campaign of hatred" has a definite design: bringing the Hindus together. Having laid law for five years, the Sangh Parivar is back on political centrage after highlighting the proselytisation issue. It believes it has been unable to regroup large chunks of the Hindu electorate in parts where the Parivars and BJPs mass support base had begun to dwindle. Without cultivating the larger Hindu electorate, the Sangh Parivar will not be able to place a "real BJP government in power." Then there will be no patching up with partners politically poles apart. The Sangh Parivar wants a government that will implement the 40-point Hindu agenda. The agenda include formation of a Hindu Rashtra.[25]

Q. What is the solution proposed by VHP International General Secretary, Pravin Togadia and Vice-President Acharya Giriraj Kishore to solve all the problems of Muslims and Christians in India?

A. They said they had no objection to Christians if their loyalties did not tilt towards the Vatican. They further said if the Christians and Muslims remembered they were from the same ethnic stock "as us", and did not deny the historical fact they shared common forefathers, all problems would be solved.[26]

Q. What was the criticism of Shankaracharya of Puri on the activities of the Sangh Parivar and the politicians?

A. The unity and integrity of this country was being endangered by the atrocities of religious fundamentalists like the RSS and the VHP. It was politicians who were driving the youth of the country into fanaticism.

The common people, the intellectuals and spiritual leaders of the country all seem to be blaming politicians for the pitiable plight the country is going through. So the question is, how to

free the nation from the grip of this brand of politicians who are fleecing the country economically and running it socially, politically, morally and spiritually.

It looks like Gandhiji succeeded in liberating our country from colonialism only to hand it over to a new brand of Indian colonialist under various brand names--Congress, Janata, Communist, BJP and the brands are multiplying like brands of toothpaste, vying with one another, peddling corruption, crime and making selfish gains in the name, and at the expense of the common man. They are like leeches. These politicians also know well that they are cheating the common man.[27]

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VII: SECULARISM

Meaning of Secularism

Q. What is the meaning of the word 'secular' and how the political term has emerged?

A. The word 'secular' is derived from the Latin - 'seculum', which meant 'temporal world'. The Oxford Dictionary also defines it as something concerned with affair of this world. It is the belief that the State, morals, education etc. should be independent of religion.

The term was politically used for the first time by an Italian thinker - Machiavelli. He said that the State should not adopt any religion as its own. Religion should be left to individual citizen - as it is a matter of personal belief and conscience. Thus from Machiavelli started the concept of secularism, meaning thereby that the State should not patronize any particular religion.[1]

Q. What is secularism?

A. "Secularism" as a way of life, is the celebration of diversity in religion. Secularism, as a Constitutional imperative, is the dissociation of the state from any one religion. The Constitution enjoins upon the state the duty of protecting the identity, security and interests of all communities.The minority communities are singled out for special mention precisely because they are minorities.

In extending this protection, the state is required to both prevent discrimination on grounds of religion and promote respect for all faiths. Jawaharlal Nehru pinpointed the essence of this duty when he declared: "If any man raises his hand against another in the name of religion, I shall fight him till the last breath of may life--whether I am in government or outside." In short, it is not possible either as a citizen or a state to raise one's hand against another in the name of religion and still remain secular.[2]

Q. What are the various meanings of secularism?

A. In India, secularism is viewed by different groups in different ways. For Gandhiji and most Hindu nationalists, secularism meant considering all religions as equal. Added to it was a notion that one should tolerate all religions because in essence they all taught brotherhood and peace. For many Marxists and Royists, secularism meant a negation of all religious ideologies and an active espousal of atheism. According to them, religion is an opium for masses and like a bad habit religion requires de-addition and de-conditioning of the masses. If there is no religion, there will be no religious conflicts. The sociologists assert that the term secularism should be differentiated from secularisation which is a process while the former term is an ideology. Secularisation as a process means the gradual loosening of the religious mode of thought, religious symbols and religious institutions from the public domain and the consciousness of people. This implies that as secularisation proceeds in society, the social system, political institutions such as political parties and the educational institutions such as schools and universities get divorced from religious practices, dogma and theological ideologies and sanctions. According to this view, as society progresses, its major institutions will be gradually divorced from religious ideas and practices. For an example, the schools and universities will create and transmit secular knowledge and will distant themselves from the religious mode of thought. The social institutions will pursue this-worldly orientation and will abjure other-worldly orientation. The society myths, magic and miracles will be replaced by the one based on science and rationality. The supernatural will be replaced by natural and the pursuit of economic goals will replace the pursuit of spiritual goals in personal and family life. While in the West, secularism implies a strict separation between church and state, in India secularism is mainly defined in terms of freedom to pursue religion for an Indian citizen and nondiscrimination of citizens on the basis of their religion. No Indian citizen will be deprived of his right to vote, right to get an admission to an educational institution, right to secure a job or right to pursue a profession on the basis of his

religion. Furthermore, the state is not based on any religion. India is not a theocratic state and it has therefore no official religion. The state has to remain impartial in religious matters and the justice has to be dispensed to the citizens based on secular laws. If the religious injunctions and penalties imposed by the religious authorities go against the civil rights of the person so punished, the civil courts will uphold the rights of an individual against the pronouncements of a religious authority. It follows from this that the state will protect the rights of the minorities to pursue their religion and lawful religious practices. The minorities will also have the rights to propagate their religion, to build places of worship, etc.[3]

Characteristics of Secularism in the Indian Context

Q. What is the specific characteristics of 'secularism' in the Indian context?

A. Secularism in India has a very meaning different from the normal way it is understood elsewhere. According to the Oxford dictionary, secularism implies that morality and education should not be based on religion. However, Jawaharlal Nehru imposed his own definition of secularism on Indian polity by restricting it to partial opposition to religion, opposition to the hegemony of upper caste Hindus and to no other religious practice. That is why he enacted the Hindu Code Bill and shied away from a pan-Indian, secular code. He even accepted Verrier Elwin's thesis that tribal communities should be left as they are and that no attempt should be made to modernise their archaic ways. Nehru's successors have moved further; for them, secularism has ceased to be a principle but is a political tool for creating vote banks, communal vote banks. Thus, the same politicians who expressed horror at the singing of Saraswati Vandana would have no qualms about appealing to the electorate strictly on religious or caste lines. Thus, secularism has become Orwellian double-speak, it says one thing and means exactly the opposite! Our politics is not divided between secularists and communalists, but between different brands of communalists.[4]

Q. What is the modern concept of secularism and the most guarantor of secularism and tolerance in India today?

A. The modern concept of secularism is connected to the modern concept of tolerance not to the pre-modern understanding of tolerance indifference. There is a world of difference between arguing that India has some chances of being a modern, tolerant socially because it has a secular state, and arguing that it is naturally and inescapably tolerant because it is Hindu. Modern political and cultural tolerance is made possible because it's necessary but not sufficient condition, is the existence of a secular state where the state by virtue of not being religiously affiliated (a basic separation of religion and state apparatuses) is not partisan towards any particular religious group of set of beliefs. This is tolerance that arises out of secularism not Hinduism. The Sangh, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi's Congress, and too many others, would have us mistakenly believe that secularism is tolerance and that secularism-tolerance arises out of Hinduism.

Something very important emerges if we are prepared to recognize the actual relationship between secularism, tolerance (in the modern sense) and Hinduism. It means that though India has been the home for millennia of a phenomenon that was given the label Hinduism only a few centuries ago, it has never been a particularly tolerant society and does not have uniquely powerful resources for combating modern-day intolerances, which incidentally, are also different from pre-modern forms of intolerance and much more powerful and dangerous.

The most important institutional guarantor of secularism and tolerance in India today is not an ancient and enduring Hinduism but our modern Constitution! That is what Mrs. Sonia Gandhi's Congress should have officially declared. Even the Sangh doesn't have the brazenness to claim that our Constitution was inspired by Hinduism.[5]

Concern, Content and Principle of Secularism

Q. What is secularism concerned with?

A. Secularism is concerned with achieving responsible, freedom and happiness in the world.

Q. What is the content of the faith of a secularist?

A. Every secularist believes that the purpose of life is that which each one gives it and recognises the right of others to do so; moral values are derived from human experience; custom cannot be substituted for conscience.

Q. What is the principal advocated by the secularist?

A. He advocates unconditional freedom of thought and dissent and work for the translation of these convictions into civilised law which guarantees everyone's right to be able to do so.

Concept of Secularism: Interpretation by Dr. Radhakrishnan

Q. What is the interpretation given to the concept "secularism" by Dr. Radhakrishnan, then Vice-President of India?

A. Soon after the first general Election, Dr. Radhakrishnan, the then vice-president of India provided interpretation of secularism based on his understanding of religion and spirituality saying: "We today speak of our secular attitudes ... We believe in freedom of conscience, secularism requires us not merely to tolerate but to understand other religions." Elsewhere, speaking to Muslim clergies he said: "the ideal of secularism means that we abandon the inhumanity of fanaticism and give up the futile hatred of others. In the secular state there will be spirit of true religion and the environment necessary for the development of a gentle and considerable view of life." In a foreword to a book on "India Nationhood and National Culture," Dr. Radhakrishnan wrote "It may appear somewhat strange that our government should be secular here does not mean irreligious or atheist or stress on material comforts. While realisation is a fact, the theory of reality is an inference. This is the meaning of a secular concept of the state though it is not generally understood."[6]

Q. Which are the four pillars of our national identity?

A. Democracy, Nationalism, Socialism and Secularism.

Difference Between Western and Indian Concept of Secularism

Q. What is the difference between the Western concept of Secularism and the Indian concept?

A. The western concept of secularism can be termed as a negative secularism. As they take it to mean - absence of any religion. But for us , secularism means equality in all religions in the eyes of the State. Thus the State has no religion of its own but hold all and every religion in equal esteem. The citizen therein are free to adopt, embrace, profess or propagate their own religions. The State on the basis of religion, should not discriminate among them. Hence our is a moral and ethical secularism.[7]

Secular Ideology of anti-BJP Parties

Q. What is the secular ideology of anti-BJP parties today?

A. The desperate anti-BJPism often gives the impression that power is the only drive; it is this search for power (or survival-anxiety) that leads to all opportunistic alliances. Interestingly, this opportunism is often legitimated in the name of secularism. It is important to realise that the abuse of secularism has done a severe damage to the growth of a healthy political culture in India. For example, these days in the political arena secularism is used for not its positive agenda: creating and nurturing the spirit of democratic humanism. Instead, it is sued as a 'certifier', something that can give legitimacy to one's anti-BJPism. As a result, from Laloo to Mulayam, from Karunanidhi to Mayawati--everyone is 'secular'. The assumption is that if you are 'secular' (and hence anti-BJP), you are free from all evils: casteism, corruption, etc. In other words, secularism is more a pretence rather than something positive, enduring and substantial.[8]

Achievement of Genuine Secularism

Q. When can genuine Indian secularism be achieved?

A.
* Indian nationhood ought not to be a matter of "partisan politics."
* All parties should uphold nationalism and strengthen the cultural foundations of Indian identity.
* Hindu and Hindutva should not made terms of abuse as some religious fundamentalists have done. Only then will it be possible to strengthen genuine secularism, root out intolerance and ensure dignity of Indians through *sava dharma sama bhav*.[9]

Indian Secular Culturee

Q. What is a 'secular culture'? What is promoted by this culture?

A. Secular culture tries to seek a rational view of life which holds the premise that religion and religious considerations be ignored or purposely excluded from human life style. The ethics here is based upon the doctrine that the ethical standards and conduct should be determined exclusively with reference to the present life and social well being of the person without any interference by religious practices. Radical Humanism believes in 'A rational human being' as a source of his/her own salvation and rejects the role of divine or supernatural as a governor.[10]

Q. Has India a political culture influenced by religious traditions? Has it got a secular political culture? Is the situation in India similar to that of US?

A. The anti-secularists are right when they say that India has a political culture which is deeply influenced by religious tradition. But they are wrong when they say that India does not have a secular political culture. For, just like the US, it has both. Each country has, two powerful political subcultures, tied together by a mix of ideology and self-interest. One seeks to subvert the religious neutrality of the state. The other seeks

to maintain it. In complex democracies like India and the US, political culture is not monochromatic. It is composed of multiple competing traditions, of which these two are the most important.

In both countries there is a constant political struggle to see which of these traditions will prevail. But in both countries there is also a vital, often ignored, meta-struggle about the salience of these traditions, and about whether or not they should continue to define the main terms of political conflict.[11]

Q. What is the essence of secularism of Indian culture?

A. Speaking at Cuttack on 14th December, 1951, Jawaharlal Nehru had said "Our country is a land of pilgrimage, people often travel to sacred places of worship. I am a pilgrim too, but I don't visit old temples. I have been on a pilgrimage for years and enjoyed it too. The place of worship is in my heart and my deity is the people of India, and I pray for their welfare." Secularism of Indian Culture recognizes the man not the religion, this was perhaps what Nehru meant when he talked of the deity he worshipped. This in one sense is the essence of "Secular Humanism", a kind of poetic Hinduism Indians have believed. Today this essence has been lost and does not exist even as a slogan. Therefore, the relevance of Radical humanism and the Indian Renaissance movement becomes much more significant today than what it was more than five decades ago. For the Indian Radical Humanist association and the Indian Renaissance Institute coming decades are bound to be the decades of challenge at the cultural grass roots than through a political level. It is important for Humanist to have a sense of past to create an identity, a fellow feeling, a family feeling. There are similar experiences across the world in Melbourne, Indian village, in Moscow or Toronto. There are advantages to our ties with each other. There are cultural ties, neither religious nor political. These are humanities, "Humanism" without adjectives caring and compassionate courage as the human choice.[12(a)]

Q. Why is the secular stream in Indian culture seems to stand betrayed?

A. The problems of fundamentalism in India if any thing, have aggravated since Independence because of the game of power politics, the multi-party system has engaged itself with. Instead of discouraging "Fundamentalism" it has let the monster grow as a monolith. However, a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural ethos of the country is the only barrier which stands in its way as a blockade. The plurality and diversity of Indian culture which could have been strength to make the secularism a lasting guaranteed phenomenon under the Indian Constitution has not succeeded in this country, which has been the only hope and vision of the people who framed the constitution. Therefore, the secular stream in Indian culture seems to stand betrayed.[b]

Development of Secularism in India

Q. How did the concept of secularism develop in India?

A. A continuous secular naturalistic philosophy has existed and been popular in Indian practice from 1st Millennia BC onwards from which came the word 'LOKAYATA' and 'DIN-E-ALLAHI'. Therefore the concept of secularism is not alien to Indian philosophical thinking as it has always been flowing as a parallel stream along with other themes. However, as materialistic thought grew increasingly stronger in Europe it grew feebler in India and it lead Europe from darkness to Renaissance, and reversal to a reactionary process in India. In spite of this Secularisation has been a continuous existence in Indian culture since religions created the myth and illusion that peace and happiness could be possible only in the next world through penance and sacrifice. It was Buddha, a historical figure, who challenged this premise. Yet the concept continued in the social structure and will do so till individuals who constitute the society realise that no other world, than the one in which one lives, exists and peace and happiness be sought and experienced only in this real world. Secularisation of a people therefore is a process through the individual effort of self-awakening and self-realisation which leads to progressive disappearance of blind faith and superstitions from the society.[c]

Relationship Between Religion and Secularism

Q. Can religion be linked with secularism?

A. This question was raised when Bal Gangadhar Tilak started organising the Ganapati festivals. It came up again when at Gandhiji's prayer meetings. "Ishwara-Allah" were called upon to bless all and Ram and Rahim were invoked as the names of the Almighty. Later some criticised the Constitution for defining secularism in a manner which did not counterpose it to religion.[13]

Q. What is the relationship of secularism with religion in our context?

A. Secularism is not anti-religious. It is not the same as the scientific temper, though the latter is a form, even an advanced form, of secularism. But it is only one of the forms of secularism. Those who are dogmatic about their faith, be it religion or some other all-embracing ideology, and are not prepared to question it much less allow anybody else to question it are well on the way to opposing secularism. You can believe in a deity and be secular. you can be an atheist and be communal.

The first and most basic pre-requisite, therefore, for being secular is to be tolerant of faiths other than one's own. For a state to be secular, it is indispensable for it to treat all faiths and all those with no faith as equal in terms of practice of these faiths or lack of faith and as irrelevant as far as the running of the state is concerned. All theoractic and ideological states are anti-secular. In this sense the Islamic states, the Buddhist states and the Communist-controlled states are not secular, though they are different in a thousand other ways.

It is worth recalling that in China in the mid-1950, Mao Zedong himself initiated the campaign for a non-ideological state with the slogan "Let a hundred flowers bloom, let different schools of thought contend." Unfortunately, the Communist Party of China was taken aback by the widespread response to the slogan. It quickly went back to the position that to question the supremacy of the Communist Party and of Marxism-Leninism

was illegal. In the former Soviet Union, Mr. Mikhail Gorbachov did achieve the separation of ideology from the state in the years of *glasmost* and *perestroika*. Despite all his other failures, this achievement could not be overthrown along with his own downfall.

In India, secularism was not only the product of a long historical development. It was an imperative need of our freedom struggle and national revolution. But it was a secularism which was not against religion. Gandhiji not only used the idiom of religion, in particular of Hinduism, to spread secularism among the masses. He considered it his religious duty to do so. He did it to unite all Indians as also to uphold the honour of Hinduism.

The Mahatma not only succeeded in secularising the Hindu mind but in integrating nationalism with secularism. It was and is one of the canards spread against him that his mode of spreading nationalism and secularism alienated the Muslims. It is forgotten that leaders like Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, Sheikh Abdullah, Abdus Samad Khan, G.M. Syeed, Maulana Azad and others who were devout Muslims and who had a mass following in areas with a Muslim majority were all his disciples.[14]

Q. Is secularism the same as atheism?

A. It is not: it is equi-distant from all religions.

Q. Will the establishment and maintenance of a secular state necessarily weaken religious beliefs and institutions?

A. The fear that the establishment and maintenance of a secular state will necessarily weaken religious beliefs and institutions, and the charge that pro-secular attitudes are necessarily anti-religious, are both completely misplaced. In the US, a long line of distinguished sociologists, from Tocqueville (1969) to Lipset (1996), have observed that quite the reverse is true. The long separation of religion and politics has fostered a continual process of renewal, which has enabled religious institutions and beliefs to flourish to an exceptional extent.[15]

Q. What was the dream of Mahatma Gandhi in relation to the multi-religious aspects of India?

A. Mahatma Gandhi had dreamt of India as a country which will be wholly tolerant, with its religions working with one another.

Religious Fundamentalism

Q. What is the spirit of religious fundamentalism?

A. While love defines the spirituality of true religion, religious fundamentalism is characterised by the spirituality of hate and intolerance. It is in responding to what s different from oneself that the contrast between the two manifests itself fully. Love has the strength to cope with what is different. Hate has the strength only to attack and undo what is different. That is why, from a spiritual perspective, love is immeasurably superior to hate. "Birds of the same feather" flocking together has no human, much less spiritual, merit. Why should anyone get any credit for doing on purpose what birds do by instinct? That is why Jesus said, "If you love only those who love you, what does it profit you?" The spiritual challenge, which only the stamina of love can address, is to "love your enemies and to pray for those who persecute you."

So the spirit of religious fundamentalism is, by definition, a spirit of hostility and intolerance. It is a force of regimentation vis-a-vis the religious community, and a spirit of alienation vis-a-vis other communities. Because it is a project of simplification and regimentation it promotes, for a while, a sense of oneness and vitality within the given community. For that reason, it is mistaken by its members as a dynamic religious phenomenon that signals the resurgence of that community.

The champions of fundamentalism seek to reinforce this deception in a variety of ways, the most important of which is the attempt to equate the religion in question with the fundamentalist ideology. The Sangh Parivar, for example, is keen to persuade the people that Hinduism is Hindutva. To the extent that they succeed in this, they can thereafter use the Hindu community as an instrument to serve their communal agenda.

This is done partly by misappropriating the symbols and rituals of Hinduism, as in the case of the trishul, saffron, Saraswati Vandana, and so on. The other familiar trick is to spread anxiety ("Hinduism is in danger") and to aggravate a sense of grievance and underprivilege (cf. "the minorities are appeased at the expense of the majority community).

Q. Why should the fundamentalist spirit seek to drive a wedge between its religious community and other communities?

A. The answer to this question may not be found wholly in any of the material or political advantages that might be derived thereby. That is because we have sufficient empirical and historical evidence that the gains through fundamentalism are short lived and insignificant when compared to the destruction and corruption it brings about. The clue to the alienating character of the fundamentalist spirit may be found in the fact that it is during periods of religious and spiritual decline that a community comes to be possessed by the spirit of fundamentalism. Spiritual decay is a precondition for the fundamentalist agenda to be adopted by at least a section of that community. In times of religious vitality, people have the discernment to see through the dangers and deceptions of the fundamentalist schemes, and may refuse to be led by the nose in their service.

But that is still not the more important reason. The fundamental purpose of religion, as Tolstoy so very ably argued, is to enable us to relate wholesomely and meaningfully to our total human situation, with its horizontal and vertical dimensions. Religion, worth the name, must be a cementing and integrating rather than alienating and integrating, rather than alienating forces. To be a cementing force at all, religion must foster the ability to relate positively to the different and the diverse, even to the hostile and the contrary. The exclusive preference for the like-minded or people of one's own persuasion, and the corresponding allergy to those who offer from ones practices and tastes is clearly a symptom of spiritual weakness and impotence. Religious fundamentalism is the offspring of this very weakness. Because it is an offspring of spiritual weak-

ness, it is overeager to project itself through metaphors of aggression and assertion. Hence its familiar accompaniments of militancy and violence. This is the principle of 'compensation', which is too well known to need any explanation. Many people, however, mistake religious fundamentalism for religious regeneration simply because they know neither their religion, nor the logic of history.

Q. What is the foremost patriotic task related to religion today?

A. The foremost patriotic task today is to educate the people on the irreligion of religious fundamentalism. It is because this has been neglected for so long that disruptive and fundamentalist forces have gained the extent of legitimacy and support that they have come to enjoy. This is dragging the nation closer and closer to the brink of disintegration.

Even though India is a secular State, we still remain a religious society. To us religion is the bedrock of life. The corruption and distortion of this sphere of human existence is, therefore, a serious matter for us. Especially so, given the organic connection between society and State in the Indian context. Because of this nexus, the corruption of religion inevitably spreads to, and undermines, the wholeness of our public life. Ironically, even when the practice of religion is deemed a private affair the practice of religious fundamentalism especially of the majoritarian variety, because a blatant public affair, violently and assertively.

The escalation of communal alienation caused by religious fundamentalism endangers the viability of our country and the well being of our people. It cripples our march toward a better tomorrow. Unless we recognize and contain this menace, we could be overwhelmed by social anarchy, political drift and, above all, economic backwardness for the generations to come. A healthy understanding of the nature and scope of religion, and the promotion of cooperation among religious communities, is far most important for our national progress than the New Economic Policy or any other economic or political project

that might be advanced from time to time. Healing the religious rift that threatens to undermine our oneness and weaken the emotional, economic and political sinews of our society is the most imperative need today.

Q. How should the above task of opposing religious fundamentalism be undertaken?

A. This task must not be undertaken in a spirit of militancy or hostility. Our primary aim should not be to oppose forces of aggression, but to bear witness to truth and to safeguard the health and wholeness of our society. Only to the extent that pursuing this positive agenda compels it, should we resist the fundamentalist project and propaganda. Even then, our spiritual culture enjoins us to 'speak the truth in love.' Of course, truth can be wielded as a weapon, and the very prospect is very tempting, especially in the context of atrocities and injustice. But when the spirit of love is excluded from the articulation of truth, it tends to enliven and encourage the fundamentalist spirit of untruth and intolerance.

It is important to make a distinction between fundamentalists and the spirit of religious fundamentalism. If this is not done, we may fight irrelevant battles and attack wrong targets. There is a real danger that in the way we fight the fundamentalists, we might further the cause of fundamentalism, and be infected with its adversarial spirit if that happens, we may expect to have at best a Pyrrhic very victory, hardly distinguishable in spirit from defeat itself.

The guiding principle in this context is Jesus instruction that we should love sinners, even as we hate sin. The distinction between the two is essentially a matter of spiritual discernment, rather than intellectual subtlety.[16]

Spirit of Tolerance

Q. What is the difference between modern and pre-modern notion of tolerance?

A. The modern notion is integrally connected to the post-Enlightenment democratic revolution of universal rights and human

equality. As such it is imbued with a new 'active sentiment' of respect for what soon came to be understood as the cultural and political rights of different others. This is a fundamentally different conception from the pre-modern concept of tolerance which was imbued with a passive sentiment of peaceable co-existence and cultural indifference not of respect for different group rights.[17]

Q. What did Swami Veivekananda say about Indian attitude towards tolerance and religion while addressing the World Parliament of Religion in Chicago in 1893?

A. While addressing the World Parliament of Religion in Chicago he had described in India as "the most wonderful land of toleration" where "Indians build temples for Mohammedans and Christians." "We not only believe in universal acceptance but accept all religious as true", he further said.

Q. What is the message or religious tolerance proclaimed by the President Mr. K.R. Narayanan on the Republic Day 1999?

A. In his address to the nation on the eve of Republic Day President Mr. K.R. Narayanan denounced the recent attacks on the Christians in different parts of the country.

* "The unity of our nation is not based on any monolithic idea, but on our age-old tradition of tolerance which is at once a pragmatic concept of living together and a philosophic concept of finding truth and goodness in every religion. Long ago."

* Mahatma Gandhi put it very simply, "I do not expect the India of my dream to develop one religion, i.e. to be wholly Hindu or wholly Christian or wholly Mussalman, but I want it to be wholly tolerant with its religions working side by side with one another."

* "The flag tells us, be ever alert, be ever on the move, go forward, work for a free, flexible compassionate, decent democratic society in which Christians, Sikhs, Moslems, Hindus, Buddhists, Jains will all find a safe shelter."

The President concluded his message quoting the great poet Maithili Sharan Gupta, "let all brothers share joys and sorrows in equal measure and let the musical note of nationalism resonate in the hearts of all."[18]

Secularism and the Constitution of India

Q. When was the word 'secularism' incorporated in the Constitution of India?

A. The word 'secularism' was not there in the Indian Constitution when it was promulgated on 26.1.1950. The word was introduced in the Preamble of the Indian Constitution by the 42nd Amendment which came into effect on 3.1.1977. Before the Amendment, India was described in the Preamble to the Constitution as a "Sovereign Democratic Republic". After the Amendment, it is described as a "Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic." No Article of the Constitution, however, was required to be amended because of the amendment in the Preamble. This was because, as observed by Justice Ahmadi (as he then was) in the case of S.R. Bommai vs Union of India (1994) (3) SCC 1), the Amendment merely made explicit what was already implicit in the provisions of the Constitution.[19]

Q. Where do we find the secular ideas of our Constitution?

A. In the preamble of the Constitution and Directive Principles of State Policies.

Q. What was the concept of secularism developed by the Indian National Congress when it came to power in 1947? How is this concept understood in the Indian Constitution?

A. When Indian National Congress came to power in India fifty years ago it declared "*DHARMA NIRPEKSITA*" as its motto and defined secular state thus: "The definition of a secular state is its non-interference in the religious matters of its citizens." It was through this definition that India became a Secular State. Under the Indian Constitution the only time the state can interfere in the religious practices is for the purposes of social reforms but because of non-interference clause this has been rather difficult to implement. In Indian context to some

extent in practice secularism does not call for absolute separation of religious rites and secular functions of the executives of the state; as it calls for equal treatment of all religions by the state, and their peaceful co-existence with the complete freedom of worship for all.

The Congress Manifesto for the first general election, January 1952, upheld the ideal of the secular state and stressed the protection of right of all minorities. This was to see that the constitution of free India upholds the secular principles of the polity essential for India's multi-religious society. Attempts were also made to incorporate secularism as a basic feature of the democratic fabric of polity. With other progressive measures and policies secularism was expected to lead to the goal of establishing a rational order through consensus and co-operation.[20]

Q. What is the principle of secularism as understood by the Constitution makers?

A. The principle of secularism, as understood by the constitution makers, is revealed in several articles of the basic law. In short it is in the sense that religion is not a factor that determines the relations between the state and its citizens. B.R. Ambedkar, known as the architect of the Indian Constitution, said: "It does not mean that we can abolish religion, it does not mean that we shall not take into consideration the religious sentiments of the people. All that a secular state means is that this Parliament shall not be competent to impose any particular religion upon the rest of the people. That is the only limitation that the Constitution recognises. We are not here to flout the sentiments of the people." The right to religion, in specific terms, is guaranteed by the constitution. Article 25 states: "Subject to public order, morality and health and to other provisions of this part, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practise and propagate religion." Propagating a religion is often mistaken as converting one to another. As the late P.B. Gajendragadkar, eminent jurist, held: "Deliberate attempts at conversion are inap-

propriate in a truly secular society." But propagation is an entirely different cup of tea. If anyone propagates the teachings of the Bhagwad Gita, the Bible, the Quran or the Guru Granth Saheb, he cannot be faulted. This is perfectly in order. So is the case with the teachings of sages. Even today we find the message of holy men or women being propagated and millions finding spiritual solace and contentment in these. We witness regularly many following the path prescribed by such holy persons and try to realise the best in them.[21]

Q. What are the provisions in the Constitution of India which uphold the principle that people of all religions in India will have equal rights and that they will be free from any discrimination by the State on the ground or religion?

A. They are provided under Article 15 and 16 of the Constitution. Article 15 says that the State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them. Clause 2 of Article 15 emphasises and implifies the above provision by laying down that no citizen shall, on any of the above grounds, be subjected to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to access to shops, public restaurants, hotels and places of public entertainment or the use of wells, tanks, etc., which are wholly or partly maintained out of State funds or are dedicated to the general public. Article 16(2) says that no citizen shall, on grounds only of religion etc., be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect of, any employment or office of the State. These provisions adequately ensure the equality of citizens belonging to all religions as far as the Constitution can do so.

Q. Which Articles provide freedom of conscience?

A. Freedom of conscience in regard to religion and the rights flowing therefrom are protected by Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution. Article 25 says that subject to public order, morality and health and to the other provisions relating to Fundamental rights, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and "the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion." It is noteworthy that conversion of people

from one religion to another is a fundamental right in India because of the use of the word "propagate" in Article 25. But the Supreme Court has made it clear that the fundamental right is available if the conversion is not brought about by either force or fraud. This means that conversion by the process of persuasion is part of a fundamental right in India. An Explanation to Article 25 says that the wearing and carrying of kirpans shall be deemed to be included in the profession of the Sikh religion. This implies that no law can be passed to prevent Sikhs from wearing and carrying kirpans.

One of the important exceptions to the freedom of conscience guaranteed by Article 25 is contained in clause 2(b) of that Article. It provides protection to laws passed for "social welfare and reform" or also for throwing open of Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of Hindus. An Explanation to this provision makes it clear that a law which throws open religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections would be available not only to Hindus but also in Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists.

Some other rights allied with freedom of conscience have been laid down in Article 26 of the Constitution. The article provides that subject to public order, morality and health, every religious denomination shall have the right to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes, to manage its own affairs in matters of religion, to own and acquired movable and immovable property and to administer such property in accordance with law. The Supreme Court has held that any law which relates to the administration of property by any religious denomination should be only regulatory and should not do away altogether with the right to administer such property.[22]

Q. What was the decision of the Supreme Court in S.R. Bommai vs. Union of India regarding secularism as embodied in the Constitution?

A. In this case the nine-judge Bench has unanimous in the view that secularism is a part of the basic structure of the Constitu-

tion. This means that even the Parliament in the exercise of its powers to amend the Constitution will not be able to water down the Constitutional provisions which guarantee that Indians will have a secular State.[23]

Q. Do the minority communities in India uphold secular values? Are they helped by other religions to become secular?

A. The minority communities of India are avid champions of secularism because they see no contradiction between their faiths and the injunctions of the Constitution. To assert that Hinduism has helped us become secular is, therefore, not to deny that the other religions of this land have also similarly promoted secularism.[24]

Nehru's Understanding of India's Nationhood and Secular Nationalism

Q. What was the understanding of Jawaharlal Nehru about India's nationhood? What was the importance of asserting India's nationhood then?

A. Whatever be the apprehensions about India's nationhood, the architects of India's freedom in 1947 had no doubts about India's national status. Jawaharlal Nehru described the moment of Independence as the moment "when an age ends and the soul of a nation long suppressed finds utterance." Status of a nation for newly independent South Asian state was a symbol of modernity and a means to gain acceptability in the western eyes. Since the basic premises of political life in the modern world were situated on 'nationality' and 'nationalism' it was necessary for India to assert her nationhood.

Q. Why did Nehru emphasised 'secular nationalism' of India?

A. Independent India became a secular democratic nation. Secular in opposition to 'religious' was a crucial element in the western discourse on modernity. Nehru's notion of secular nationalism was treated as superior to any other form of nationalism India had ever known. It was the classical liberal form of nationalism that paved way for 'unity in diversity.' The argu-

ment was that despite the diversity and complexity of social order in India, there existed underlying essential unity. After all, India was not merely an invention or a complex byproduct of the opportunities provided by the British Raj, or a vision of nationalist elite; a certain kind of united coherence always existed in the long history of India. It was these unitary impulses underlying the Indian culture that needed to be garnered to create a politico-civic identity of an Indian overarching his primordial identity.

Political leadership in India as in other former colonies found that secular nationalism provided justification for their political existence, and legitimacy to their political power. It also helped them to emerge as national leaders ahead of a multitude of traditional, ethnic and religious leaders.

It must be recognized that all forms of nationalism have one psychological root that is the urge for identity--whether for an individual or for a community of people. At the time of independence when India emerged as one unified nation, it created a strong psychological feeling of strength for the masses of Indians, never experienced before. Nationalism, Secularism and Science became passwords for India's entry into big modern world along with Parliamentary Democracy and Nehru's version of socialism. According to Nehru, "there was no going back to a past full of religious identities for the modern secular spirit of the age will inevitably triumph throughout the world." His vision of the world was one of free and equal secular nations.

This secular nationalism as a dominant paradigm defining the newly born state of India made the state the principle engine of social change.[25(a)]

Q. Did Nehru try to accommodate religion in his paradigm of secular nationalism? What was the difference in the religious vision of Nehru and Gandhi?

A. Though in the early years of independence religion was made marginal or peripheral to political order, Nehru also tried to

accommodate religion in his paradigm of secular nationalism by co-opting elements of religion and thereby keeping religion from building its own independent power base. Gerald Larson offers an interesting explanation to distinguish between Gandhian and Nehruvian religious vision. According to him, Gandhi had created a mass movement based on a neo-Hindu vision of universalism, what Nehru did was a "kind of demythologization" of the same vision in terms of secularism, democracy, socialism, mixed economy and non-alignment. Gandhi's vision was that of decentralisation and sarvodaya while Nehru favoured a strong centre, rapid industrialisation and democratic socialism.[b]

Q. What were the reasons for slackening in the observance and promotion of secularism in the post-Nehru years?

A. This came about on account of several factors, such as populist politics, idea of vote-banks for garnering the votes of different castes and communities, policies of appeasement of conservative elements in the minorities such as Muslims and an opportunistic approach to winning and retaining power. Democracy was reduced to manipulative politics, parliamentary government was transformed into prime ministerial government, centralisation of power was the order of the day and the process of politicization of castes and communities was pursued for winning power. The new so-called theorics like KHAM, comprising Kshatriyas, Harijans, Adivasis and Muslims underlined the new approach to electoral politics. In their search for power political parties explored every possible means so as to vanquish the rival parties. It is in this context that the 'Hindu' card or "Muslim" card came in handy.

Q. What was the effect of such an approach?

A. Such an approach contained seeds of discord. It was highly damaging and proved to be suicidal to the democratic setup. There is no doubt that democracy is a government by consent and whichever party wins a majority is called upon to form the government. But the majority and minority are based upon the changing patterns of public opinion, they are not fixed in terms

of communities. In fact, democratic politics do not and cannot regard any community as one single monolithic unit to be bandied about as fixed categories. Public opinion continues to change irrespective of the caste and/or the community. Neither the majority nor the minority is fixed for ever.[26]

Secular Nationalism Vs. Religious Nationalism

Q. What is the content of religious nationalism? How does it differ from secular nationalism?

A. Both secular and religious nationalism cover a substantial common ground. Both serve an ethical function of providing an overarching framework of moral order as well as moral sanction to martyrdom and violence. Both are expressions of faith, demand loyalty to a large community and legitimise authority of a leader in a community. Both are competing ideologies of order and hence potential rivals.[27]

Secular Society & Secular State

Q. What is the difference between a secular society and a secular state?

A. Secularism is continuous process and the establishment of secular State comes at a certain stage in that process. It is a continuous profess which started from the time when religion created the illusion that peace and happiness could be obtained only in the next world (the imaginary heaven) and continues till the society and the individuals who constitute it realise that no other world exists than the one in which they live must that the peace and happiness of all of them must be sought only in this world.

Q. What is the purpose and nature of a secular state?

A. The main purpose of a secular state is to ensure that all the people who constitute the State will have freedom of conscience, so that persons of different faiths will have the same rights and responsibilities and no discrimination between them would exist. The secular State recognises that its coercive powers would not interfere with any religious belief or practice

except where it is quite necessary to do so for the purpose of social reform. A secular State realises that the process of secularisation of society will continue after its establishment and that the State will not intervene in that process except when it is quite necessary.[28]

Q. What are the principles of a secular State?

A. The first principle of a secular State is that all the people are free to adopt any religious faith which they prefer and no discrimination should be practiced by the State in dealing with persons having different faiths. Freedom of conscience, which implies non-discrimination between persons having different faiths, is thus the first principle of a secular State. The second principle, which follows from the first, is that the State should have no religion of its own. If the State espouses a particular religion, it is more than likely that persons who do not profess that religion would be treated as inferior citizens.

The third principle of a secular State is that of non-interference by religion in the affairs of the State and by the State in the affairs of religion.[29]

Secularist Movement in Europe

Q. What was the reason for initiation of secularistic movement in Europe? How has it developed? What was its effect on secular affairs of life?

A. The excessive pre-occupation with the imaginary other world and neglected of the affairs of this life led to a prolonged period of social stagnation, from which a rescue was possible only if the people's concern was redirected towards the secular affairs of life. This necessary transformation was initiated by a movement known as the European Renaissance. The renaissance movement started in the 12th century in Italy and really developed in Europe during the period between the middle of the 14th to the middle of the 16th century. Prior to the renaissance the mental life of the people was under the domination of the Christian clerical order, which was supported by kings and lords who benefitted from the maintenance of the status quo.

The purpose of the renaissance movement was to assert the centrality of the human individual as against the supremacy of the Christian clergy. The man of the renaissance insisted that the human individual was a free moral entity because his morality was derived from his conscience which he regarded as the voice of God and that the dictates of the clergy were not necessary for maintaining a moral life. Drawing inspiration from the ancient Greek civilisation, the men of renaissance turned their attention to art and literature and to the secular affairs of life. The renaissance movement greatly weakened the power of the clerical order and also weakened the belief in the divine right of kings. Growth of science and growth of democracy were the consequences of the erosion of popular support to priests and princes. It was the renaissance movement which gave a fillip to a secular movement aimed at improving our life on earth by the aid of knowledge acquired through the development of science.

Q. How were democracy and democratic values slowly established in western Europe?

A. Erosion of the popular faith in the divine right of kings led eventually to the establishment of democracy in several countries in Western Europe. Liberty, equality and fraternity came to be recognised at the basic values of democracy. While the popular acceptance of the value of liberty was a natural consequence of erosion in the power of priests and princes brought about by the growth of rationalism during the renaissance movement, a further explanation is required to show how the moral principles of equality and fraternity became popular as the result of the secularisation of society brought about by growth in rationalism. The explanation is found in the fact that religious orthodoxy was the main cause of moral degradation in the middle ages. Religious orthodoxy of the people was exploited for personal gain by the clergy, and advantages thereof was also taken by the kings and their henchmen. Monasteries in Europe became "cesspools of corruption" and Papal favours were sold as marketable commodities. Resentment against the corrupt practices of the clergy led to the movement for Refor-

mation and to the establishment of Protestantism in Europe. Reformation was succeeded by the Age of Enlightenment in the 18th century which was brought about by the growth of nationalism in society. There is thus a direct relation between rationalism, secularisation and moral development. As observed by the sociologist Morris Ginsberg: "The essential point in the theory of progress remains true, namely, that in the course of historical development, man is slowly rationalised and that man is moralised in proportion as he become more rational." That shows why, apart from liberty of the individual, the moral principles of equality and fraternity came to be regarded as the basic values of democracy[30]

Q. What was done by the Sangh Parivar to create a monolithic militant Hindu majority? How did the minorities react to the concept of Indianisation formulated by Bharatiya Jana Sangh in 1960s?

A. To create a monolithic militant Hindu majority a Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) was found in 1925. It initiated this ideology and equated national culture with Hindu culture. The Bharatiya Jana Sangh in 1960s based its controversial programme of 'Indianization' on this very idea and demanded the subordination of all narrow loyalties like religion, caste, language or dogma to the overriding loyalty to the 'Nation.' The non-Hindus in India, especially the Muslims, were quick to perceive implications of 'Indianisation' and the Jan Sangh's then leading ideologue Balraj Madhok was equally quick to dispel the fears of the minorities by explaining that it aimed at making every citizen of India a better Indian, a good patriot and a nationalist. But elsewhere, he made himself clearly unambiguous when he stated "It is the Hinduness of a man that makes him a national of India". [31]

Q. Why did the United Front Government (a secular government) fail?

A. Besides uncertain Congress support, there were three main causes responsible for the UF debacle. First, the inability of the UF leadership to rise above intra-party factionalism and

inter-party rivalry to exercise the kind of charismatic statesmanship necessary to consolidate and guide the secular forces against communalism. This was a political failure. Second, the failure of the CPI and CPI(M) supported UF to evolve an economic programme beyond the Congress-led and IMF-World Bank-dictated liberalisation and a hollow centre-left populism to serve the vast majority of Indians. This was the economic failure. Third, the incapability of the UF constituents, despite their proclamations to the contrary, to nurture a grass roots secular agenda and movement with the unambiguous objective of defeating the so-called majoritarian communal forces led by the Hindu chauvinist the BJP. This was the social and strategic failure. In short, the UF failed at the hustings because its vision could not transcend the limits set by casteist politics, the desperation imposed upon it due to vacillating Congress support and the economic regime fashioned by the policies of Manmohan Singh.

There are two other points. First, the secularists are divided in their attitude towards the BJP and its allies since March 1998. This division shows that the secularists are still ambiguous in their definition of secularism and the means needed to achieve it.[32]

Threat to Indian Democracy

Q. What poses the single most serious threat to Indian democracy today?

A. The denial or violently snatching away of the basic human rights of minorities to life, protection by law, access to employment and right to residence in any part of the country have been insidiously taking place under the increasing social sway of the communal ideology of Hindutva which is anti-democratic, anti-poor and anti-minority. The basic ethic and morale of democratic institutions like the law and order machinery--the police, the executive and even the judiciary--have been eroded by the successful inroads that this very ideology has made into the functioning of the administration and the executive and of

the Indian mainstream. This, therefore, poses the single most serious threat to Indian democracy today.[33]

Ways of Strengthening Secularism in India

Q. Is India a secular country? If not, how to make it secular?

A. The fundamental point therefore is to accept that India is not a secular country. We have to make it one. In fact, history tells us that we were never a secular country. The post-Ayodhya fanatical outbursts are too fresh in our minds. The horrors of Partition are still haunting. Even earlier in history there was no peace and harmony. Had it been so, there would have been no need of Sufism or people like Kabir teaching universal brotherhood. The situation can at best be described as one of a back to back existence. Even Ashoka's inscriptions stress the need for tolerance. The assertion that the past was tolerant and harmonious is a myth which has rhetorical value alone. Similarly the assertion that the present is essentially and inherently secular is one of the greatest myths peddled in modern India.

The recognition of this myth entails a resolve to make India secular. And this necessitates an alternative conception of secularism whose cornerstone would be democracy. India today needs nothing short of a democratic revolution which would challenge the asymmetries of power in terms of caste, class and gender. The forces that would be unleashed through such a democratic movement would ultimately undermine the forces of orthodox fanaticism. In a country like India, this translates into a struggle for basic rights of the people, like clean drinking water, schooling and the right to lead a dignified life. Secularism would emerge as a by-product of such a widespread people's democratic struggle. And it is only through the wresting of such public spaces by the people that ultimately secularism can be sustained in this country. Secularism from above can only be seen as an imposition if it is not sustained by a cultural process from below.

The nefarious activities of various parties as well as those of the state can only be checked through the widest possible dem-

ocratic movement which would enable the formation of a secular unity among the people. Secularism would be the by-product of such a movement. Needless to say, it would be initiated on the question of basic rights of citizenship.[34]

Q. At the moment what is required to strengthen secularism?

A. At the moment, secularism, narrowly or broadly defined, requires a commitment and agenda which is contemporary and goes beyond Stalinist cloak and dagger methods, designed and employed by official Marxists, with the aid of casteist politicians, to 'topple' popular governments. Secularism, as an open system, obviously cannot be reduced to a conspiracy of select leaders unwilling to see the importance of popular perceptions in a democratic country. Doing that, as experience shows, will rebound on the secularists because secularism is as much a matter of perception as reality.[35]

Q. What is to be done to carry forward the secular character of the Indian State?

A. It is necessary not only to reinforce the secular tradition but to carry it forward. One of the most important ways in which this can be done is to dispel the impression that Hinduism is the only religion which is compatible with secularism. It is true that the incomplete and regionally uneven detribalisation of our country had a great deal to do with the persistence of different trends in Hinduism which enhanced its capacity to adapt and adopt. This, however, was a characteristic of India. It laid its imprint on Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity, Sikhism and Islam. Retaining their distinctiveness they all became Indian.[36]

Q. When will India become secular?

A. India will be secular only when it will give freedom to every religion and allow each culture to develop.

Q. How can the secularists influence society and counter spurious arguments about religious concepts of cultural values?

A. By coming to the aid of the deprived and the exploited secularists will come in contact with the pro-democracy, environmental and emancipation struggles and be able to influence them with more secular values. It is only then that they can answer spurious arguments about regional or religious concepts of cultural values, be they Hindu, Islamic or Christian. The secularists must demonstrate that their values in theory as well as translated into practice are a cultural accomplishment of mankind.

Q. What should the leaders do to build secularism more constructively and to prevent fascist forces remaining in power for a long period?

A. They must examine whether fascist governments can be popular. Can fascist coalitions, with internal-contradictions, manage to impose their agenda on a country as vast and plural as India? How conservative can a right-wing coalition become to be legitimately called fascist? These are some of the questions the secularists must answer to make their posture vis-a-vis the BJP and its allies meaningful. As far as a study of history is concerned some answers are forthcoming. The experiences of Germany and Italy in the 1930s shows that fascist governments can be popular and socially sustainable at least for a decade or so. This history of 20th century Spain under Franco and the USSR under Stalin drives home the lesson that dictatorships can overcome crisis and endure in trying and varying circumstances. At home the emergency (1975-77) highlights the ease with which authoritarianism can abuse our democratic values. In short, the potential of fascism to disrupt and distort the normal course of a country's history cannot be denied. However, the period for which it can successfully do so depends on different circumstances.

Q. Should the secularists reinvigorate their ideology and ranks whether the BJP stays in or out of power?

A. Whether the BJP stays in or out of power the secularists will have to reinvigorate their ideology and ranks because on the horizon are other issues like structural-adjustment, federalism,

regional assertion, casteism and non-parliamentary popular movements to contend with.[37]

Q. What is to be done to ensure that India is, and will continue to be a secular society?

A. The provisions of the Indian Constitution, although they are helpful to the preservation of secularism, are not enough by themselves to ensure that India is, and will continue to be, a country which has of a secular society. A secular society cannot be established merely by the coercive process of law. It can be established only by the dissemination among the people the principles of rationalism and secularism and consolidating those principles. Even today, religious orthodoxy and blind faith prevail in substantial sections of Indian society belonging to all religions. Communalism prevails even today among sections of the police forces and in the administrative services of the Central and State Governments. The setting up of secular State is only part of the process of creating and consolidating a secular society by making the values of rationalism and secularism a deep-rooted part of the country's culture.[38]

Q. How can we re-inforce the foundations of democracy in India?

A. It is incumbent upon the intellectuals of our land to analyse the danger and to carry on a campaign against communalism with all their strength and might so as to restore secularism and democracy to their rightful place. Our society, now better named as civil society, is being endangered by the State, both in lack of the right policy and the employment of oppressive force in crushing human rights. "Against the fascist tendencies of communalism, the conceptualisation of civil society as a series of cultural practices that accepts diversity, dialogue and respect for each other, cultivates the soil of tolerance... Since the consensual model represented by the Nehruvian state has exhausted itself, the solution to India's political, social and cultural problems lies in a politically conscious civil society." (Chandhoke, 1995)

Our task is to fortify our democracy through the sustenance of secularism. Secularism is the cementing bond that would strengthen Indian society, cultivate its diversity and ultimately reinforce the foundations of democracy.[39]

Q. What is the most rigorous positive and effective approach to fight the BJP brand of politics?

A. It is possible to evolve a more rigorous, positive and effective approach to fight the BJP brand of politics. To think of this new approach is to realise the limitations of electoral politics. Because in electoral politics we see a chronic obsession with numbers (percentage of votes, number of seats in legislative bodies), a faulty belief that the social reality can be altered in the parliamentary space. The fact is that one needs patience (not instant desire for power) and long-term conviction (not temporal electoral strategy). Let us reflect on the nature of this desirable intervention.

To begin with, it is important to tap the real potential of the emergent subaltern awakening in Indian society. The manifestations of this subaltern assertion can be seen in divergent movements led by the tribals, the poor people and the marginalised castes. Politics is no longer the monopoly of learned/upper caste elites. Politics is fast becoming a tool of empowerment for the marginalised and the oppressed. yet, the irony is that this subaltern energy is often released through misdirected channels: Mayawati and Kanshi Ram reducing Dalit politics into an opportunistic game, Laloo and his disciples lumpenising the backyard caste assertion!

With the trivialisation of the subaltern energy the BJP brand of politics cannot be fought. Instead, the BJP too would appropriate this vulgar subaltern energy and pose a challenge to its 'secular' opponents like Mayawati and Mulayam. Kalyan Singh is the name of this game. In a way, Kalyan, Mulayam and Mayawati constitute a vicious circle. To break this circle is to give a new direction to subaltern politics. Because the potential of subaltern politics is radical and emancipatory. With the appropriate political articulation it would mean a search for

what Gandhi would call the real god; adequate living conditions (food, shelter, health, education and employment) for a peaceful, decentralised, community-oriented existence. This would lead to new aspirations--togetherness (not divisiveness), sharing (not possessiveness) and dialogicity (not nonologistic temptations). The real subaltern mind, needless to add, would go against all sorts of exclusivist/arrogant mentality. That's why the challenge is to nurture and evolve this emancipatory subaltern energy. This requires rigorous political education.

It is also important to work in the domain of culture. because the BJP politics, as we have indicated, is also a kind of cultural politics. It has got a cultural agenda: unite India, on the basis of the Hindu identity, use religion to arouse political ambition. It is, therefore, important to rescue culture or religion from the BJP. This is possible if we see the deeper meaning of religiosity: religiosity as elevation of consciousness and expression of love and solidarity. it is also necessary to see innumerable possibilities in our culture (imagine the diversity and richness of our folk cultural traditions) and thereby resist any effort towards standardization and homogenisation through monolithic Hindutva. It is this sensitivity to religious humanism and plurality that can fight the cultural politics of the BJP. This, however, requires an organic relationship with the people, their existential aspirations and anxieties. This means a new kind of politics: politics as the art of relatedness, not as the objectification of people.

This emphasis on authentic subaltern energy, cultural sensitivity and political education, for some, may look 'idealistic' or 'impractical'. But then, if there is nothing more important than 'pragmatism', you cannot fight the BJP. because it can always argue that all that is does is, after all, 'pragmatic': be it the politics of demolition or the classification of people on the basis of religion![40]

Need of Amendment to the Representation of People's Act, 1951

Q. What should be done to make the provisions in the Representation of People Act, 1951, which prevent seeking of votes on the basis of religion, more effective?

A. There are some provisions in the Representation of People's Act, 1951, which prevent seeking of votes on the basis of religion and which requires every political party which wants to have an election symbol to embody in its constitution that secularism and socialism are among its objectives. These provisions are largely ineffective. A political party can undertake propaganda to secure votes on the basis of religion at all times, except during what is known as the election period. The provision that a political party wanting an election symbol should have secularism as one of its objectives is a provision which can be easily evaded by a party which seeks power on the basis of communalism. What is required for preventing political parties from seeking power by propagating communalism is to enact an appropriate law relating to political parties which, among other things, would provide that a party which resorts to communalist propaganda for electoral purposes will be debarred from contesting any election. The law should provide a machinery which would make the ban effective.[41]

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MESSAGE OF SATYA SAI BABA

Q. What was the message of Satya Sai Baha given in March'99 in Delhi in the context of growing crimes and hatred among the people?

A.
* Speak the language of the heart.
* Follow the religion of love.
* Belong to the caste of humanity.
* Be spiritually awakened.
* Dounce the fire that engulfs India our home.
* Give up the consumer culture that thrives on greed and lust.
* Find a radical remedy for violence, corruption and communalism in India.
* Promote love, non-violence, unity and a sense of service.
* Emphasis the centrality and dignity of the human beings who carry the spark of divinity within.
* Serve God in the poor, the weak, the voiceless and the downtrodden of the society.
* Serve those around you selflessly, with a pure love and that is the best way to God.

  "Dil mein Ram, Haath mein Kaam" (god in heart, work in hands) is the best way of religion - a religion of love.
* Adopt the path of righteousness and self-surrender to almighty.
* Politics without principles is hollow; science without humanity is harsh; education without character formation is futile and commerce without mortality is useless.
* Render initial service in love. 'help ever, hurt never.'

* Remove the pollution of the mind caused by 'kama and krodha' - the parents of murders, rape etc.
* Seek peace as the need of the hour. Find it within ourselves. Unless we are at peace with our own selves we cannot be at peace with others and with God - who is all in all. Today there is a lot of hatred. Only the mean-minded people hate. So long as there is hated, there will not be any peace.
* While we love our motherland, we should not criticise other counties.
* All partymen must sink their differences and uphold the principles of unity and togetherness.
* There should be a spiritual awakening among the rulers and the ruled alike of this country where the act of governance had been regulated by the discipline of the dharma (truth, justice and ahimsa) from time immemorial.
* The righteous force of Dharma should enable our Dharmarajas of the present times to protect the people from anarchy and lawlessness.
* The protecting mantle of Dharma should enable everyone to enjoy a political and social order where human worth is valued and all can live in peace and without fear.[1]

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India is a multi-religious, multi-lingual and multi-cultural country. Yet it has no State religion. It is a secular State which gives equal status to every religion. The Constitution of India guarantees freedom of religion to all persons and protection of the cultural rights to all its citizens, especially the minorities. The founding members of the Constitution envisaged to develop India into a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic Republic. They categorically resolved that the new State would not be a Hindu Rashtra but a secular State. Unfortunately, religious chauvinism and communalism have been on the increase, in recent times in social and political life. The Sangh Parivar and its socio-political units are trying to use religion to divide the people of India in order to acquire political power. This has disastrous consequence for the unity and integrity of the country and the development of the people. They are spreading a communal and fundamentalist political ideology called 'Hindutva' to create a Hindu Rashtra. This trend is against the basic principles of the Constitution of India.

This book is a modest attempt to educate the common people regarding the principles and philosophy of Hinduism, Hindutva and Secularisı aims and functioning of the Sangh Parivar. The c are based on the judicial decisions of the Supr opinions expressed by various knowledgeabl papers and magazines.

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